

Though the character of Octavius is neither attractive nor wholly clear, his figure is invested with a certain tragic dignity, because he is felt to be the Man of Destiny, the agent of forces against which the intentions of an individual would avail nothing. He is represented as having himself some feeling of this sort. His lament over Antony, his grief that their stars were irreconcilable, may well be genuine, though we should be surer if it were uttered in soliloquy. His austere words to Octavia again probably speak his true mind :

Be you not troubled with the time, which drives
O'er your content these strong necessities;
But let determined things to destiny
Hold unbewailed their way.

In any case the feeling of fate comes through to us. It is aided by slight touches of supernatural effect; first in the Soothsayer's warning to Antony that his genius or angel is overpowered whenever he is near Octavius; then in the strangely effective scene where Antony's soldiers, in the night before his last battle, hear music in the air or under the earth :

'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved,
Now leaves him.

And to the influence of this feeling in giving impressiveness to the story is added that of the immense scale and world-wide issue of the conflict. Even the distances traversed by fleets and armies enhance this effect.

And yet there seems to be something half-hearted in Shakespeare's appeal here, something even ironical in his presentation of this conflict. Its external magnitude, like Antony's magnificence in lavishing realms and gathering the kings of the East in his

him. Her brother Octavius Cæsar was willing vnto it, not for his respect at all (as most authors do report) as for that he might haue an honest colour to make warre with Antonius if he did misuse her, and not esteeme of her as she ought to be.'—*Life of Antony* (North's Translation), sect. 29. The view I take does not, of course, imply that Octavius had no love for his sister.

support, fails to uplift or dilate the imagination. The struggle in Lear's little island seems to us to have an infinitely wider scope. It is here that we are sometimes reminded of *Troilus and Cressida*, and the cold and disenchanting light that is there cast on the Trojan War. The spectacle which he portrays leaves Shakespeare quite undazzled; he even makes it appear inwardly small. The lordship of the world, we ask ourselves, what is it worth, and in what spirit do these 'world-sharers' contend for it? They are no champions of their country like Henry V. The conqueror knows not even the glory of battle. Their aims, for all we see, are as personal as if they were captains of banditti; and they are followed merely from self-interest or private attachment. The scene on Pompey's galley is full of this irony. One 'third part of the world' is carried drunk to bed. In the midst of this mock boon-companionship the pirate whispers to his leader to cut first the cable of his ship and then the throats of the two other Emperors; and at the moment we should not greatly care if Pompey took the advice. Later, a short scene, totally useless to the plot and purely satiric in its purport, is slipped in to show how Ventidius fears to pursue his Parthian conquests because it is not safe for Antony's lieutenant to outdo his master.¹ A painful sense of hollowness oppresses us. We know too well what must happen in a world so splendid, so false, and so petty. We turn for relief from the political game to those who are sure to lose it; to those who love some human being better than a prize, to Eros and Charmian and Iras; to Enobarbus, whom the world corrupts, but who has a heart that can break with shame; to the lovers, who seem to us to find in death something better than their victor's life.

This presentation of the outward conflict has two results. First, it blunts our feeling of the greatness

¹ See Note B.

of Antony's fall from prosperity. Indeed this feeling, which we might expect to be unusually acute, is hardly so; it is less acute, for example, than the like feeling in the case of Richard II., who loses so much smaller a realm. Our deeper sympathies are focussed rather on Antony's heart, on the inward fall to which the enchantment of passion leads him, and the inward recovery which succeeds it. And the second result is this. The greatness of Antony and Cleopatra in their fall is so much heightened by contrast with the world they lose and the conqueror who wins it, that the positive element in the final tragic impression, the element of reconciliation, is strongly emphasised. The peculiar effect of the drama depends partly, as we have seen, on the absence of decidedly tragic scenes and events in its first half; but it depends quite as much on this emphasis. In any Shakespearean tragedy we watch some elect spirit colliding, partly through its error and defect, with a superhuman power which bears it down; and yet we feel that this spirit, even in the error and defect, rises by its greatness into ideal union with the power that overwhelms it. In some tragedies this latter feeling is relatively weak. In *Antony and Cleopatra* it is unusually strong; stronger, with some readers at least, than the fear and grief and pity with which they contemplate the tragic error and the advance of doom.

3.

The two aspects of the tragedy are presented together in the opening scene. Here is the first. In Cleopatra's palace one friend of Antony is describing to another, just arrived from Rome, the dotage of their great general; and, as the lovers enter, he exclaims:

Look, where they come:
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see.

With the next words the other aspect appears :

CLEO. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANT. There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

CLEO. I'll set a bourne how far to be beloved.

ANT. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

And directly after, when he is provoked by reminders of the news from Rome :

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall ! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay : our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man : the nobleness of life
Is to do thus.

Here is the tragic excess, but with it the tragic greatness, the capacity of finding in something the infinite, and of pursuing it into the jaws of death.

The two aspects are shown here with the exaggeration proper in dramatic characters. Neither the phrase 'a strumpet's fool,' nor the assertion 'the nobleness of life is to do thus,' answers to the total effect of the play. But the truths they exaggerate are equally essential ; and the commoner mistake in criticism is to understate the second. It is plain that the love of Antony and Cleopatra is destructive ; that in some way it clashes with the nature of things ; that, while they are sitting in their paradise like gods, its walls move inward and crush them at last to death. This is no invention of moralising critics ; it is in the play ; and any one familiar with Shakespeare would expect beforehand to find it there. But then to forget because of it the other side, to deny the name of love to this ruinous passion, to speak as though the lovers had utterly missed the good of life, is to mutilate the tragedy and to ignore a great part of its effect upon us. For we sympathise with them in their passion ; we feel in it the infinity there is in man ; even while we acquiesce in their defeat we are exulting

in their victory; and when they have vanished
we say,

the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

Though we hear nothing from Shakespeare of the cruelty of Plutarch's Antony, or of the misery caused by his boundless profusion, we do not feel the hero of the tragedy to be a man of the noblest type, like Brutus, Hamlet, or Othello. He seeks power merely for himself, and uses it for his own pleasure. He is in some respects unscrupulous; and, while it would be unjust to regard his marriage exactly as if it were one in private life, we resent his treatment of Octavia, whose character Shakespeare was obliged to leave a mere sketch, lest our feeling for the hero and heroine should be too much chilled. Yet, for all this, we sympathise warmly with Antony, are greatly drawn to him, and are inclined to regard him as a noble nature half spoiled by his time.

It is a large, open, generous, expansive nature, quite free from envy, capable of great magnanimity, even of entire devotion. Antony is unreserved, naturally straightforward, we may almost say simple. He can admit faults, accept advice and even reproof, take a jest against himself with good-humour. He is courteous (to Lepidus, for example, whom Octavius treats with cold contempt); and, though he can be exceedingly dignified, he seems to prefer a blunt though sympathetic plainness, which is one cause of the attachment of his soldiers. He has none of the faults of the brooder, the sentimentalist, or the man of principle; his nature tends to splendid action and lusty enjoyment. But he is neither a mere soldier nor a mere sensualist. He has imagination, the temper of an artist who revels in abundant and rejoicing appetites, feasts his senses on the glow and richness of life, flings himself into its mirth and revelry, yet feels the poetry in all this,

and is able also to put it by and be more than content with the hardships of adventure. Such a man could never have sought a crown by a murder like Macbeth's, or, like Brutus, have killed on principle the man who loved him, or have lost the world or a Cressida.

Beside this strain of poetry he has a keen intellect, a swift perception of the lie of things, and much quickness in shaping a course to suit them. In *Julius Cæsar* he shows this after the assassination, when he appears as a dexterous politician as well as a warm-hearted friend. He admires what is fine, and can fully appreciate the nobility of Brutus; but he is sure that Brutus's ideas are moonshine, that (as he says in our play) Brutus is mad; and, since his mighty friend, who was incomparably the finest thing in the world, has perished, he sees no reason why the inheritance should not be his own. Full of sorrow, he yet uses his sorrow like an artist to work on others, and greets his success with the glee of a successful adventurer. In the earlier play he proves himself a master of eloquence, and especially of pathos; and he does so again in the later. With a few words about his fall he draws tears from his followers and even from the caustic humorist Enobarbus. Like Richard II., he sees his own fall with the eyes of a poet, but a poet much greater than the young Shakespeare, who could never have written Antony's marvellous speech about the sunset clouds. But we listen to Antony, as we do not to Richard, with entire sympathy, partly because he is never unmanly, partly because he himself is sympathetic and longs for sympathy.

The first of living soldiers, an able politician, a most persuasive orator, Antony nevertheless was not born to rule the world. He enjoys being a great man, but he has not the love of rule for rule's sake. Power for him is chiefly a means to pleasure. The pleasure he wants is so huge that he needs a

huge power ; but half the world, even a third of it, would suffice. He will not pocket wrongs, but he shows not the slightest wish to get rid of his fellow Triumvirs and reign alone. He never minded being subordinate to Julius Cæsar. By women he is not only attracted but governed ; from the effect of Cleopatra's taunts we can see that he had been governed by Fulvia. Nor has he either the patience or the steadfastness of a born ruler. He contends fitfully, and is prone to take the step that is easiest at the moment. This is the reason why he consents to marry Octavia. It seems the shortest way out of an awkward situation. He does not intend even to try to be true to her. He will not think of the distant consequences.

A man who loved power as much as thousands of insignificant people love it, would have made a sterner struggle than Antony's against his enchantment. He can hardly be said to struggle at all. He brings himself to leave Cleopatra only because he knows he will return. In every moment of his absence, whether he wake or sleep, a siren music in his blood is singing him back to her ; and to this music, however he may be occupied, the soul within his soul leans and listens. The joy of life had always culminated for him in the love of women : he could say 'no' to none of them : of Octavia herself he speaks like a poet. When he meets Cleopatra he finds his Absolute. She satisfies, nay glorifies, his whole being. She intoxicates his senses. Her wiles, her taunts, her furies and meltings, her laughter and tears, bewitch him all alike. She loves what he loves, and she surpasses him. She can drink him to his bed, out-jest his practical jokes, out-act the best actress who ever amused him, out-dazzle his own magnificence. She is his play-fellow, and yet a great queen. Angling in the river, playing billiards, flourishing the sword he used at Philippi, hopping forty paces in a public

street, she remains an enchantress. Her spirit is made of wind and flame, and the poet in him worships her no less than the man. He is under no illusion about her, knows all her faults, sees through her wiles, believes her capable of betraying him. It makes no difference. She is his heart's desire made perfect. To love her is what he was born for. What have the gods in heaven to say against it? To imagine heaven is to imagine her; to die is to rejoin her. To deny that this is love is the madness of morality. He gives her every atom of his heart.

She destroys him. Shakespeare, availing himself of the historic fact, portrays, on Antony's return to her, the suddenness and the depth of his descent. In spite of his own knowledge, the protests of his captains, the entreaties even of a private soldier, he fights by sea simply and solely because she wishes it. Then in mid-battle, when she flies, he deserts navy and army and his faithful thousands and follows her. 'I never saw an action of such shame,' cries Scarus; and we feel the dishonour of the hero keenly. Then Shakespeare begins to raise him again. First, his own overwhelming sense of shame redeems him. Next, we watch the rage of the dying lion. Then the mere sally before the final defeat—a sally dismissed by Plutarch in three lines—is magnified into a battle, in which Antony displays to us, and himself feels for the last time, the glory of his soldiership. And, throughout, the magnanimity and gentleness which shine through his desperation endear him to us. How beautiful is his affection for his followers and even for his servants, and the devotion they return! How noble his reception of the news that Enobarbus has deserted him! How touchingly significant the refusal of Eros either to kill him or survive him! How pathetic and even sublime the completeness of his love for Cleopatra! His anger is born and dies in an hour.

One tear, one kiss, outweighs his ruin. He believes she has sold him to his enemy, yet he kills himself because he hears that she is dead. When, dying, he learns that she has deceived him once more, no thought of reproach crosses his mind: he simply asks to be carried to her. He knows well that she is not capable of dying because he dies, but that does not sting him; when, in his last agony, he calls for wine that he may gain a moment's strength to speak, it is to advise her for the days to come. Shakespeare borrowed from Plutarch the final speech of Antony. It is fine, but it is not miraculous. The miraculous speeches belong only to his own hero:

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips;

or the first words he utters when he hears of Cleopatra's death:

Unarm, Eros: the long day's task is done,
And we must sleep.

If he meant the task of statesman and warrior, that is not what his words mean to us. They remind us of words more familiar and less great—

No rest but the grave for the pilgrim of love.

And he is more than love's pilgrim; he is love's martyr.

4.

To reserve a fragment of an hour for Cleopatra, if it were not palpably absurd, would seem an insult. If only one could hear her own remarks upon it! But I had to choose between this absurdity and the plan of giving her the whole hour; and to that plan there was one fatal objection. She has been described (by Ten Brink) as a courtesan of genius. So brief a description must needs be incomplete, and Cleopatra never forgets, nor, if we read aright,

do we forget, that she is a great queen. Still the phrase is excellent; only a public lecture is no occasion for the full analysis and illustration of the character it describes.

Shakespeare has paid Cleopatra a unique compliment. The hero dies in the fourth Act, and the whole of the fifth is devoted to the heroine.¹ In that Act she becomes unquestionably a tragic character, but, it appears to me, not till then. This, no doubt, is a heresy; but as I cannot help holding it, and as it is connected with the remarks already made on the first half of the play, I will state it more fully. Cleopatra stands in a group with Hamlet and Falstaff. We might join with them Iago if he were not decidedly their inferior in one particular quality. They are inexhaustible. You feel that, if they were alive and you spent your whole life with them, their infinite variety could never be staled by custom; they would continue every day to surprise, perplex, and delight you. Shakespeare has bestowed on each of them, though they differ so much, his own originality, his genius. He has given it most fully to Hamlet, to whom none of the chambers of experience is shut, and perhaps more of it to Cleopatra than to Falstaff. Nevertheless, if we ask whether Cleopatra, in the first four Acts, is a tragic figure like Hamlet, we surely cannot answer 'yes.' Naturally it does not follow that she is a comic figure like Falstaff. This would be absurd; for, even if she were ridiculous like Falstaff, she is not ridiculous to herself; she is no humorist. And yet there is a certain likeness. She shares a weakness with Falstaff—vanity; and when she displays it, as she does quite naïvely (for instance, in the second interview with the Messenger), she does become comic. Again, though like Falstaff she is irresistible and carries

¹ The point of this remark is unaffected by the fact that the play is not divided into acts and scenes in the folios

us away no less than the people around her, we are secretly aware, in the midst of our delight, that her empire is built on sand. And finally, as his love for the Prince gives dignity and pathos to Falstaff in his overthrow, so what raises Cleopatra at last into pure tragedy is, in part, that which some critics have denied her, her love for Antony.

Many unpleasant things can be said of Cleopatra; and the more that are said the more wonderful she appears. The exercise of sexual attraction is the element of her life; and she has developed nature into a consummate art. When she cannot exert it on the present lover she imagines its effects on him in absence. Longing for the living, she remembers with pride and joy the dead; and the past which the furious Antony holds up to her as a picture of shame is, for her, glory. She cannot see an ambassador, scarcely even a messenger, without desiring to bewitch him. Her mind is saturated with this element. If she is dark, it is because the sun himself has been amorous of her. Even when death is close at hand she imagines his touch as a lover's. She embraces him that she may overtake Iras and gain Antony's first kiss in the other world.

She lives for feeling. Her feelings are, so to speak, sacred, and pain must not come near her. She has tried numberless experiments to discover the easiest way to die. Her body is exquisitely sensitive, and her emotions marvellously swift. They are really so; but she exaggerates them so much, and exhibits them so continually for effect, that some readers fancy them merely feigned. They are all-important, and everybody must attend to them. She announces to her women that she is pale, or sick and sullen; they must lead her to her chamber but must not speak to her. She is as strong and supple as a leopard, can drink down a master of revelry, can raise her lover's helpless heavy body from the ground into her tower with the aid

only of two women; yet, when he is sitting apart sunk in shame, she must be supported into his presence, she cannot stand, her head droops, she will die (it is the opinion of Eros) unless he comforts her. When she hears of his marriage and has discharged her rage, she bids her women bear her away; she faints; at least she would faint, but that she remembers various questions she wants put to the Messenger about Octavia. Enobarbus has seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment than the news that Antony is going to Rome.

Some of her feelings are violent, and, unless for a purpose, she does not dream of restraining them; her sighs and tears are winds and waters, storms and tempests. At times, as when she threatens to give Charmian bloody teeth, or hales the luckless Messenger up and down by the hair, strikes him and draws her knife on him, she resembles (if I dare say it) Doll Tearsheet sublimated. She is a mother; but the threat of Octavius to destroy her children if she takes her own life passes by her like the wind (a point where Shakespeare contradicts Plutarch). She ruins a great man, but shows no sense of the tragedy of his ruin. The anguish of spirit that appears in his language to his servants is beyond her; she has to ask Enobarbus what he means. Can we feel sure that she would not have sacrificed him if she could have saved herself by doing so? It is not even certain that she did not attempt it. Antony himself believes that she did—that the fleet went over to Octavius by her orders. That she and her people deny the charge proves nothing. The best we can say is that, if it were true, Shakespeare would have made that clear. She is willing also to survive her lover. Her first thought, to follow him after the high Roman fashion, is too great for her. She would live on if she could, and would cheat her victor too of the best part of her fortune. The thing that drives her to die is the

certainly that she will be carried to Rome to grace his triumph. That alone decides her.¹

The marvellous thing is that the knowledge of all this makes hardly more difference to us than it did to Antony. It seems to us perfectly natural, nay, in a sense perfectly right, that her lover should be her slave; that her women should adore her and die with her; that Enobarbus, who foresaw what must happen, and who opposes her wishes and braves her anger, should talk of her with rapture and feel no bitterness against her; that Dolabella, after a minute's conversation, should betray to her his master's intention and enable her to frustrate it. And when Octavius shows himself proof against her fascination, instead of admiring him we turn from him with disgust and think him a disgrace to his species. Why? It is not that we consider him bound to fall in love with her. Enobarbus did not; Dolabella did not; we ourselves do not. The feeling she inspires was felt then, and is felt now, by women no less than men, and would have been shared by Octavia herself. Doubtless she wrought magic on the senses, but she had not extraordinary beauty, like Helen's, such beauty as seems divine.² Plutarch says so. The man who wrote the sonnets to the dark lady would have known it for himself. He goes out of his way to add to her age, and tells us of her wrinkles and the waning of her lip. But Enobarbus, in his very mockery, calls her a wonderful piece of work. Dolabella interrupts her with the cry, 'Most sovereign creature,' and we echo it. And yet Octavius, face to face with her and listening to her voice, can think only how best to trap her and drag her to public dishonour in the streets of Rome. We forgive him only for his words when he sees her dead:

She looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

¹ See Note C.

² See Note D.

And the words, I confess, sound to me more like Shakespeare's than his.

That which makes her wonderful and sovereign laughs at definition, but she herself came nearest naming it when, in the final speech (a passage surpassed in poetry, if at all, only by the final speech of Othello), she cries,

I am fire and air ; my other elements
I give to baser life.

The fire and air which at death break from union with those other elements, transfigured them during her life, and still convert into engines of enchantment the very things for which she is condemned. I can refer only to one. She loves Antony. We should marvel at her less and love her more if she loved him more—loved him well enough to follow him at once to death ; but it is to blunder strangely to doubt that she loved him, or that her glorious description of him (though it was also meant to work on Dolabella) came from her heart. Only the spirit of fire and air within her refuses to be trammelled or extinguished ; burns its way through the obstacles of fortune and even through the resistance of her love and grief ; and would lead her undaunted to fresh life and the conquest of new worlds. It is this which makes her 'strong toil of grace' unbreakable ; speaks in her brows bent and every tone and movement ; glorifies the arts and the rages which in another would merely disgust or amuse us ; and, in the final scenes of her life, flames into such brilliance that we watch her entranced as she struggles for freedom, and thrilled with triumph as, conquered, she puts her conqueror to scorn and goes to meet her lover in the splendour that crowned and robed her long ago, when her barge burnt on the water like a burnished throne, and she floated to Cydnus on the enamoured stream to take him captive for ever.¹

¹ Of the 'good' heroines, Imogen is the one who has most of this

Why is it that, although we close the book in a triumph which is more than reconciliation, this is mingled, as we look back on the story, with a sadness so peculiar, almost the sadness of disenchantment? Is it that, when the glow has faded, Cleopatra's ecstasy comes to appear, I would not say factitious, but an effort strained and prodigious as well as glorious, not, like Othello's last speech, the final expression of character, of thoughts and emotions which have dominated a whole life? Perhaps this is so, but there is something more, something that sounds paradoxical: we are saddened by the very fact that the catastrophe saddens us so little; it pains us that we should feel so much triumph and pleasure. In *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, though in a sense we accept the deaths of hero and heroine, we feel a keen sorrow. We look back, think how noble or beautiful they were, wish that fate had opposed to them a weaker enemy, dream possibly of the life they might then have led. Here we can hardly do this. With all our admiration and sympathy for the lovers we do not wish them to gain the world. It is better for the world's sake, and not less for their own, that they should fail and die. At the very first they came before us, unlike those others, unlike Coriolanus and even Macbeth, in a glory already tarnished, half-ruined by their past. Indeed one source of strange and most unusual effect in their story is that this marvellous passion comes to adepts in the experience and art of passion, who might be expected to have worn its charm away. Its splendour dazzles us; but, when the splendour vanishes, we do not mourn, as we mourn for the love of Romeo or Othello, that a thing so bright and good should die. And the fact that we mourn so little saddens us.

spirit of fire and air | and this (in union, of course, with other qualities) is perhaps the ultimate reason why for so many readers she is, what Mr. Swinburne calls her, 'the woman above all Shakespeare's women.'

A comparison of Shakespearean tragedies seems to prove that the tragic emotions are stirred in the fullest possible measure only when such beauty or nobility of character is displayed as commands unreserved admiration or love; or when, in default of this, the forces which move the agents, and the conflict which results from these forces, attain ■ terrifying and overwhelming power. The four most famous tragedies satisfy one or both of these conditions; *Antony and Cleopatra*, though a great tragedy, satisfies neither of them completely. But to say this is not to criticise it. It does not attempt to satisfy these conditions, and then fail in the attempt. It attempts something different, and succeeds as triumphantly as *Othello* itself. In doing so it gives us what no other tragedy can give, and it leaves us, no less than any other, lost in astonishment at the powers which created it.

1905

NOTE A

We are to understand, surely, that Enobarbus dies of 'thought' (melancholy or grief), and has no need to seek a 'swifter mean.' Cf. iv. vi. 34 *seg.*, with the death-scene and his address there to the moon as the 'sovereign mistress of true melancholy' (iv. ix.). Cf. also iii. xiii., where, to Cleopatra's question after Actium, 'What shall we do, Enobarbus?' he answers, 'Think, and die.'

The character of Enobarbus is practically an invention of Shakespeare's. The death-scene, I may add, is one of the many passages which prove that he often wrote what pleased his imagination but would lose half its effect in the theatre. The darkness and moonlight could not be represented on a public stage in his time.

NOTE B

The scene is the first of the third Act. Here Ventidius says:

Cæsar and Antony have ever won
More in their officer than person: Sossius,
One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
For quick accumulation of renown,
Which he achieved by the minute, lost his favour.

Plutarch (North, sec. 19) says that 'Sossius, one of Antonius' lieutenants in Syria, did notable good service,' but I cannot find in him the further statement that Sossius lost Antony's favour. I presume it is Shakespeare's invention, but I call attention to it on the bare chance that it may be found elsewhere than in Plutarch, when it would point to Shakespeare's use of a second authority.

NOTE C

Since this lecture was published (*Quarterly Review*, April, 1906) two notable editions of *Antony and Cleopatra* have been produced. Nothing recently written on Shakespeare, I venture to say, shows more thorough scholarship or better judgment than Mr. Case's edition in the Arden series; and Dr. Furness has added to the immense debt which students of Shakespeare owe to him, and (if that is possible) to the admiration and respect with which they regard him, by the appearance of *Antony and Cleopatra* in his New Variorum edition.

On one question about Cleopatra both editors, Mr. Case more tentatively and Dr. Furness very decidedly, dissent from the interpretation given in the last pages of my lecture. The question is how we are to understand the fact that, although on Antony's death Cleopatra expresses her intention of following him, she does not carry out this intention until she has satisfied herself that Octavius means to carry her to Rome to grace his triumph. Though I do not profess to feel certain that my interpretation is right, it still seems to me a good deal the most probable, and therefore I have not altered what I wrote. But my object here is not to defend my view or to criticise other views, but merely to call attention to the discussion of the subject in Mr. Case's Introduction and Dr. Furness's Preface.

NOTE D

Shakespeare, it seems clear, imagined Cleopatra as a gipsy. And this, I would suggest, may be the explanation of a word which has caused much difficulty. Antony, when 'all is lost,' exclaims (iv. x. 38):

O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,—
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home,
Whose bosom was my crownnet, my chief end,—
Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss.

Pope changed 'grave' in the first line into 'gay.' Others conjecture 'great' and 'grand.' Steevens says that 'grave' means

'deadly,' and that the word 'is often used by Chapman' thus; and one of his two quotations supports his statement; but certainly in Shakespeare the word does not elsewhere bear this sense. It could mean 'majestic,' as Johnson takes it here. But why should it not have its usual meaning? Cleopatra, we know, was a being of 'infinite variety,' and her eyes may sometimes have had, like those of some gipsies, a mysterious gravity or solemnity which would exert a spell more potent than her gaiety. Their colour, presumably, was what is called 'black'; but surely they were not, like those of Tennyson's Cleopatra, '*bold* black eyes.' Readers interested in seeing what criticism is capable of may like to know that it has been proposed to read, for the first line of the quotation above, 'O this false fowl of Egypt! haggard charmer.' [Though I have not cancelled this note I have modified some phrases in it, as I have not much confidence in my suggestion, and am inclined to think that Steevens was right.]

SHAKESPEARE THE MAN

SHAKESPEARE THE MAN

SUCH phrases as 'Shakespeare the man' or 'Shakespeare's personality' are, no doubt, open to objection. They seem to suggest that, if we could subtract from Shakespeare the mind that produced his works, the residue would be the man himself; and that his mind was some pure impersonal essence unaffected by the accidents of physique, temperament, and character. If this were so, one could but echo Tennyson's thanksgiving that we know so little of Shakespeare. But as it is assuredly not so, and as 'Shakespeare the man' really means the one indivisible Shakespeare, regarded for the time from a particular point of view, the natural desire to know whatever can be known of him is not to be repressed merely because there are people so foolish as to be careless about his works and yet curious about his private life. For my own part I confess that, though I should care nothing about the man if he had not written the works, yet, since we possess them, I would rather see and hear him for five minutes in his proper person than discover a new one. And though we may be content to die without knowing his income or even the surname of Mr. W. H., we cannot so easily resign the wish to find the man in his writings, and to form some idea of the disposition, the likes and dislikes, the character and the attitude towards life, of the human

being who seems to us to have understood best our common human nature.

The answer of course will be that our biographical knowledge of Shakespeare is so small, and his writings are so completely dramatic, that this wish, however natural, is idle. But I cannot think so. Doubtless, in trying to form an idea of Shakespeare, we soon reach the limits of reasonable certainty; and it is also true that the idea we can form without exceeding them is far from being as individual as we could desire. But it is more distinct than is often supposed, and it *is* reasonably certain; and although we can add to its distinctness only by more or less probable conjectures, they are not mere guesses, they really have probability in various degrees. On this whole subject there is a tendency at the present time to an extreme scepticism, which appears to me to be justified neither by the circumstances of the particular case nor by our knowledge of human nature in general.

This scepticism is due in part to the interest excited by Mr. Lee's discussion of the Sonnets in his *Life* of Shakespeare, and to the importance rightly attached to that discussion. The Sonnets are lyrical poems of friendship and love. In them the poet ostensibly speaks in his own person and expresses his own feelings. Many critics, no doubt, had denied that he really did so; but they had not Mr. Lee's knowledge, nor had they examined the matter so narrowly as he; and therefore they had not much weakened the general belief that the Sonnets, however conventional or exaggerated their language may sometimes be, do tell us a good deal about their author. Mr. Lee, however, showed far more fully than any previous writer that many of the themes, many even of the ideas, of these poems are commonplaces of Renaissance sonnet-writing; and he came to the conclusion that in the Sonnets Shakespeare 'unlocked,' not 'his heart,' but a very

different kind of armoury, and that the sole biographical inference deducible from them is that 'at one time in his career Shakespeare disdained no weapon of flattery in an endeavour to monopolise the bountiful patronage of a young man of rank.' Now, if that inference is correct, it certainly tells us something about Shakespeare the man; but it also forbids us to take seriously what the Sonnets profess to tell us of his passionate affection, with its hopes and fears, its pain and joy; of his pride and his humility, his self-reproach and self-defence, his weariness of life and his consciousness of immortal genius. And as, according to Mr. Lee's statement, the Sonnets alone of Shakespeare's works 'can be held to throw any illumination on a personal trait,' it seems to follow that, so far as the works are concerned (for Mr. Lee is not specially sceptical as to the external testimony), the only idea we can form of the man is contained in that single inference.

Now, I venture to surmise that Mr. Lee's words go rather beyond his meaning. But that is not our business here, nor could a brief discussion do justice to a theory to which those who disagree with it are still greatly indebted. What I wish to deny is the presupposition which seems to be frequently accepted as an obvious truth. Even if Mr. Lee's view of the Sonnets were indisputably correct, nay, if even, to go much further, the persons and the story in the Sonnets were as purely fictitious as those of *Twelfth Night*, they might and would still tell us something of the personality of their author. For however free a poet may be from the emotions which he simulates, and however little involved in the conditions which he imagines, he cannot (unless he is a mere copyist) write ■ hundred and fifty lyrics expressive of those simulated emotions without disclosing something of himself, something of the way in which he in particular *would* feel and behave under the imagined conditions. And the

same thing holds in principle of the dramas. Is it really conceivable that a man can write some five and thirty dramas, and portray in them an enormous amount and variety of human nature, without betraying anything whatever of his own disposition and preferences? I do not believe that he could do this, even if he deliberately set himself to the task. The only question is how much of himself he would betray.

One is entitled to say this, I think, on general grounds; but we may appeal further to specific experience. Of many poets and novelists we know a good deal from external sources. And in these cases we find that the man so known to us appears also in his works, and that these by themselves would have left on us a personal impression which, though imperfect and perhaps in this or that point even false, would have been broadly true. Of course this holds of some writers much more fully than of others; but, except where the work is very scanty in amount, it seems to hold in some degree of all.¹ If so, there is an antecedent probability that it will apply to Shakespeare too. After all, he was human. We may exclaim in our astonishment that he was as universal and impartial as nature herself; but this is the language of religious rapture. If we assume that he was six times as universal as Sir Walter Scott, which is praise enough for a mortal, we may hope to form an idea of him from his plays only six times as dim as the idea of Scott that we should derive from the *Waverley Novels*.

And this is not all. As a matter of fact, the great majority of Shakespeare's readers—lovers of poetry

¹Unquestionably it holds in a considerable degree of Browning, who in *At the Mermaid* and *House* wrote as though he imagined that neither his own work nor Shakespeare's betrayed anything of the inner man. But if we are to criticise those two poems as arguments, we must say that they involve two hopelessly false assumptions, that we have to choose between a self-revelation like Byron's and no self-revelation at all, and that the relation between a poet and his work is like that between the inside and the outside of a house.

untroubled by theories and questions—do form from the plays some idea of the man. Knowingly or not, they possess such an idea; and up to a certain point the idea is the same. Ask such a man whether he thinks Shakespeare was at all like Shelley, or Wordsworth, or Milton, and it will not occur to him to answer 'I have not the faintest notion'; he will answer unhesitatingly No. Ask him whether he supposes that Shakespeare was at all like Fielding or Scott, and he will probably be found to imagine that, while differing greatly from both, he did belong to the same type or class. And such answers unquestionably imply an idea which, however deficient in detail, is definite.

Again, to go a little further in the same direction, take this fact. After I had put together my notes for the present lecture, I re-read Bagehot's essay on Shakespeare the Man, and I read a book by Goldwin Smith and an essay by Leslie Stephen (who, I found, had anticipated a good deal that I meant to say).¹ These three writers, with all their variety, have still substantially the same idea of Shakespeare; and it is the idea of the competent 'general reader' more fully developed. Nor is the value of their agreement in the least diminished by the fact that they make no claim to be Shakespeare scholars. They show themselves much abler than most scholars, and if they lack the scholar's knowledge they are free from his defects. When they wrote their essays they had not wearied themselves with rival hypotheses, or pored over

¹ Almost all Shakespearean criticism, of course, contains something bearing on our subject; but I have a practical reason for mentioning in particular Mr. Frank Harris's articles in the *Saturday Review* for 1898. A good many of Mr. Harris's views I cannot share, and I had arrived at almost all the ideas expressed in the lecture (except some on the Sonnets question) before reading his papers. But I found in them also valuable ideas which were quite new to me and would probably be so to many readers. It is a great pity that the articles are not collected and published in a book. [Mr. Harris has published, in *The Man Shakespeare*, the substance of the articles, and also matter which, in my judgment, has much less value.]

minutiae until they lost the broad and deep impressions which vivid reading leaves. Ultra-scepticism in this matter does not arise merely or mainly from the humility which every man of sense must feel as he creeps to and fro in Shakespeare's prodigious mind. It belongs either to the clever faddist who can see nothing straight, or it proceeds from those dangers and infirmities which the expert in any subject knows too well.

The remarks I am going to make can have an interest only for those who share the position I have tried to indicate; who believe that the most dramatic of writers must reveal in his writings something of himself, but who recognise that in Shakespeare's case we can expect a reasonable certainty only within narrow limits, while beyond them we have to trust to impressions, the value of which must depend on familiarity with his writings, on freedom from prejudice and the desire to reach any particular result, and on the amount of perception we may happen to possess. I offer my own impressions, insecure and utterly unprovable as I know them to be, simply because those of other readers have an interest for me; and I offer them for the most part without argument, because even where argument might be useful it requires more time than a lecture can afford. For the same reason I shall assume, without attempting to define it further, and without dilating on its implications, the truth of that general feeling about Shakespeare and Fielding and Scott.

But, before we come to impressions at all, we must look at the scanty store of external evidence: for we may lay down at once the canon that impressions derived from the works must supplement and not contradict this evidence, so far as it appears trustworthy. It is scanty, but it yields a decided outline.

This figure that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut :

—so Jonson writes of the portrait in the Folio, and the same adjective 'gentle' is used elsewhere of Shakespeare. It had not in Elizabethan English so confined a meaning as it has now ; but it meant something, and I do not remember that their contemporaries called Marlowe or Jonson or Marston 'gentle.' Next, in the earliest extant reference that we have to Shakespeare, the writer says that he himself has seen his 'demeanour' to be 'civil.'¹ It is not saying much ; but it is not the first remark an acquaintance would probably have made about Ben Jonson or Samuel Johnson. The same witness adds about Shakespeare that 'divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing which argues his honesty.' 'Honesty' and 'honest' in an Elizabethan passage like this mean more than they would now ; they answer rather to our 'honourable' or 'honour.' Lastly we have the witness borne by Jonson in the words : 'I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature.' With this notable phrase, to which I shall have to return, we come to an end of the testimony of eye-witnesses to Shakespeare the Man (for we have nothing to do with references to the mere actor or author). It is scanty, and insufficient to discriminate him from other persons who were gentle, civil, upright in their dealings, honourable, open, and free : but I submit that there have been not a few writers to whom all these qualities could not be truly ascribed, and that the testimony therefore does tell us something definite. To which must be added that we have absolutely

¹ He is apologising for an attack made on Shakespeare in a pamphlet of which he was the publisher and Greene the writer.

no evidence which conflicts with it. Whatever Greene in his jealous embitterment might have said would carry little weight, but in fact, apart from general abuse of actors, he only says that the upstart had an over-weening opinion of his own capacities.

There remain certain traditions and certain facts; and without discussing them I will mention what seems to me to have a more or less probable significance. Stratford stories of drinking bouts may go for nothing, but not the consensus of tradition to the effect that Shakespeare was a pleasant and convivial person, 'very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit.'¹ That after his retirement to Stratford he spent at the rate of £1000 a year is incredible, but that he spent freely seems likely enough. The tradition that as a young man he got into trouble with Sir Thomas Lucy for deer-stealing (which would probably be an escapade rather than an essay in serious poaching) is supported by his unsavoury jest about the 'lucres' in Sir Robert Shallow's coat. The more general statement that in youth he was wild does not sound improbable; and, obscure as the matter is, I cannot regard as comfortable the little we know of the circumstances of his very early marriage. A contemporary story of an amorous adventure in London may well be pure invention, but we have no reason to reject it peremptorily as we should any similar gossip about Milton. Lastly, certain inferences may safely be drawn from the facts that, once securely started in London, Shakespeare soon began to prosper, and acquired, for an actor and playwright, considerable wealth; that he bought property in his native town, and was consulted sometimes by fellow-townsmen

¹ It was said of him, indeed, in his lifetime that, had he not played some kingly parts in sport (*i.e.* on the stage), he would have been a companion for a king.

on matters of business; that he enforced the payment of certain debts; and that he took the trouble to get a coat of arms. But what cannot with any logic or any safety be inferred is that he, any more than Scott, was impelled to write simply and solely by the desire to make money and improve his social position; and the comparative abundance of business records will mislead only those who are thoughtless enough to forget that, if they buy a house or sue a debtor, the fact will be handed down, while their kind or generous deeds may be recorded, if at all, only in the statement that they were 'of an open and free nature.'

That Shakespeare was a good and perhaps keen man of business, or that he set store by a coat of arms, we could not have inferred from his writings. But we could have judged from them that he worked hard, and have guessed with some probability that he would rather have been a 'gentleman' than an actor. And most of the other characteristics that appear from the external evidence would, I think, have seemed probable from a study of the works. This should encourage us to hope that we may be right in other impressions which we receive from them. And we may begin with one on which the external evidence has a certain bearing.

Readers of Shakespeare, I believe, imagine him to have been not only sweet-tempered but modest and unassuming. I do not doubt that they are right; and, vague as the Folio portrait and the Stratford bust are, it would be difficult to believe that their subject was an irritable, boastful, or pushing person. But if we confine ourselves to the works, it is not easy to give reasons for the idea that their author was modest and unassuming; and a man is not necessarily so because he is open, free, and very good company. Perhaps we feel that a man who was not so would have allowed much

more of himself to appear in his works than Shakespeare does. Perhaps again we think that anything like presumption or self-importance was incompatible with Shakespeare's sense of the ridiculous, his sublime common-sense, and his feeling of man's insignificance. And, lastly, it seems to us clear that the playwright admires and likes people who are modest, unassuming, and plain; while it may perhaps safely be said that those who lack these qualities rarely admire them in others and not seldom despise them. But, however we may justify our impression that Shakespeare possessed them, we certainly receive it; and assuming it to be as correct as the similar impression left by the *Waverley Novels* indubitably is, I go on to observe that the possession of them does not of necessity imply a want of spirit, or of proper self-assertion or insistence on rights.¹ It did not in Scott, and we have ground for saying that it did not in Shakespeare. If it had, he could not, being of an open and free nature, have prospered as he prospered. He took offence at Greene's attack on him, and showed that he took it. He was 'gentle,' but he liked his debts to be paid. However his attitude as to the enclosure at Welcombe may be construed, it is clear that he had to be reckoned with. It appears probable that he held himself wronged by Sir Thomas Lucy, and, pocketing up the injury because he could not resent it, gave him tit for tat after some fifteen years. The man in the *Sonnets* forgives his friend easily, but it is not from humility; and towards the world he is very far from humble. Of the dedication of *The Rape of Lucrece* we cannot judge, for we do not know Shakespeare's relations with Lord Southampton at that date; but, as for the dedication of *Venus and Adonis*, could modesty and dignity be better mingled in a letter from a young poet to a great noble than they are there?

¹ Nor, *vice versa*, does the possession of these latter qualities at all imply, as some writers seem to assume, the absence of the former or of gentleness.

Some of Shakespeare's writings point to a strain of deep reflection and of quasi-metaphysical imagination in his nature; and a few of them seem to reveal a melancholy, at times merely sad, at times embittered or profound, if never hopeless. It is on this side mainly that we feel a decided difference between him and Fielding, and even between him and Scott. Yet nothing in the contemporary allusions or in the traditions would suggest that he was notably thoughtful or serious, and much less that he was melancholy. And although we could lay no stress on this fact if it stood alone, it is probably significant. Shakespeare's writings, on the whole, leave a strong impression that his native disposition was much more gay than grave. They seem always to have made this impression. Fuller tells us that 'though his genius generally was jocular and inclining him to festivity, yet he could, when so disposed, be solemn and serious, as appears by his tragedies.'¹ Johnson agreed with Rymer that his 'natural disposition' led him to comedy; and, although Johnson after his manner distorts a true idea by wilful exaggeration and by perverting distinctions into antitheses, there is truth in his development of Rymer's remark. It would be easy to quote nineteenth century critics to the same effect; and the study of Shakespeare's early works leads to a similar result. It has been truly said that we feel ourselves in much closer contact with his personality in the early comedies and in *Romeo and Juliet* than in *Henry VI.* and *Richard III.* and *Titus Andronicus*. In the latter, so far as we suppose them to be his own, he seems on the whole to be following, and then improving on, an existing style, and to be dealing with subjects which engage him as a play-

¹ Fuller may be handing down a tradition, but it is not safe to assume this. His comparison, on the other hand, of Shakespeare and Jonson, in their wit-combats, to an English man-of-war and a Spanish great galleon, reads as if his own happy fancy were operating on the reports, direct or indirect, of eye-witnesses.

wright without much appealing to him personally. With *Romeo and Juliet*, on the other hand, and with *Richard II.* (which seems clearly to be his first attempt to write historical tragedy in a manner entirely his own), it is different, and we feel the presence of the whole man. The stories are tragic, but it is not precisely the *tragic* aspect of them that attracts him most; and even Johnson's statement, grotesquely false of the later tragedies, that 'in tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic,' is no more than an exaggeration in respect to *Romeo and Juliet*.¹ From these tragedies, as from *Love's Labour's Lost* and the other early comedies, we should guess that the author was a young man, happy, alert, light-hearted, full of romance and poetry, but full also of fun; blessed with a keen enjoyment of absurdities, but, for all his intellectual subtlety and power, not markedly reflective, and certainly not particularly grave or much inclined to dejection. One might even suspect, I venture to think, that with such a flow of spirits and such exceeding alacrity of mind he might at present be a trifle wanting in feeling and disposed to levity. In any case, if our general impression is correct, we shall not find it hard to believe that the author of these plays and the creator of Falstaff was 'very good company' and a convivial good-fellow; and it might easily happen that he was tempted at times to 'go here and there' in society, and 'make himself a motley to the view' in a fashion that left some qualms behind.²

¹ See, for example, Act IV. Sc. v., to which I know no parallel in the later tragedies.

² I allude to Sonnet 110, Mr. Beeching's note on which seems to be unquestionably right: 'There is no reference to the poet's profession of player. The sonnet gives the confession of a favourite of society.' This applies, I think, to the whole group of sonnets (it begins with 107) in which the poet excuses his neglect of his friend, though there are *also* references to his profession and its effect on his nature and his reputation. (By a slip Mr. Beeching makes the neglect last for three years.)

There is a tradition that Shakespeare was 'a handsome well-shaped man.' If the Stratford monument does not lie, he was not in later life a meagre man. And if our notion of his temperament has any truth, he can hardly have been physically feeble, bloodless, or inactive. Most readers probably imagine him the reverse. Even sceptical critics tell us that he was fond of field-sports; and of his familiar knowledge of them there can be no question. Yet—I can but record the impression without trying to justify it—his writings do not at all suggest to me that he was a splendidly powerful creature like Fielding, or that he greatly enjoyed bodily exertion, or was not easily tired. He says much of horses, but he does not make one think, as Scott does, that a gallop was a great delight to him. Nor again do I feel after reading him that he had a strong natural love of adventurous deeds, or longed to be an explorer or a soldier. The island of his boyish dreams—if he heard much of voyages as a boy—was, I fancy, the haunt of marmosets and hedgehogs, quaint moon-calves and flitting sprites, lovely colours, sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not, less like *Treasure Island* than the *Coral Island* of Ballantyne in the original illustrations, and more full of wonders than of dangers. He would have liked the *Arabian Nights* better than *Dumas*. Of course he admired men of action, understood them, and could express their feelings; but we do not feel particularly close to his personality as we read the warrior speeches of *Hotspur*, *Henry*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, as we do when we read of *Romeo* or *Hamlet*, or when we feel the attraction of *Henry's* modesty. In the same way, I suppose nobody feels Shakespeare's personal presence in the ambition of *Macbeth* or the pride of *Coriolanus*; many feel it in *Macbeth's* imaginative terrors, and in the disgust of *Coriolanus* at the idea of recounting his exploits in order to win votes. When we seem

to hear Shakespeare's voice—and we hear it from many mouths besides Romeo's or Hamlet's—it is the voice of a man with a happy, enjoying, but still contemplative and even dreamy nature, not of a man richly endowed with the impulses and feelings either of strenuous action or of self-assertion. If he had drawn a Satan, we should not have felt his personality, as we do Milton's, in Satan's pride and indomitable courage and intolerance of rule.

We know how often Shakespeare uses the antithesis of blood or passion, and judgment or reason; how he praises the due commingling of the two, or the control of the first by the second; how frequently it is the want of such control that exposes his heroes to the attack of Fortune or Fate. What, then, were the passions or the 'affections of the blood' most dangerous to himself? Not, if we have been right, those of pride or ambition; nor yet those of envy, hatred, or revenge; and still less that of avarice. But, in the first place, let us remember Jonson's words, 'he was honest and of an open and free nature,' and let me repeat an observation, made elsewhere in passing, that these words are true also of the great majority of Shakespeare's heroes, and not least of his tragic heroes. Jonson almost quotes Iago:

The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so.

The king says that Hamlet,

being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contrivings,
Will not peruse the foils.

The words 'open and free' apply no less eminently to Brutus, Lear, and Timon. Antony and Coriolanus are men naturally frank, liberal, and large. Prospero lost his dukedom through his trustfulness. Romeo and Troilus and Orlando, and many slighter characters, are so far of the same type. Now such

a free and open nature, obviously, is specially exposed to the risks of deception, perfidy, and ingratitude. If it is also a nature sensitive and intense, but not particularly active or (if the word may be excused) volitional, such experiences will tempt it to melancholy, embitterment, anger, possibly even misanthropy. If it is thus active or volitional, it may become the prey of violent and destructive passion; such as that of Othello and of Coriolanus, and such as Lear's would be if he were not so old. These affections, passions, and sufferings of free and open natures are Shakespeare's favourite tragic subject; and his favouritism, surely, goes so far as to constitute a decided peculiarity, not found thus in other tragic poets. Here he painted most, one cannot but think, what his own nature was most inclined to feel. But it would rather be melancholy, embitterment, an inactive rage or misanthropy, than any destructive passion; and it would be a further question whether, and how far, he may at any time have experienced what he depicts. I am speaking here only of his disposition.¹

That Shakespeare was as much inclined to be a lover as most poets we may perhaps safely assume; but can we conjecture anything further on this subject? I will confine myself to two points. He treats of love romantically, and tragically, and humorously. In the earlier plays especially the humorous aspect of the matter, the aspect so prominent in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, the changefulness, brevity, irrationality, of the feeling, is at least as much dwelt on as the romantic, and with at least as much relish:

Lord! what fools these mortals be!

¹ It is perhaps most especially in his rendering of the shock and the effects of *disillusionment* in open natures that we seem to feel Shakespeare's personality. The nature of this shock is expressed in Henry's words to Lord Scroop:

I will weep for thee:
For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like
Another fall of man.

Now, if there is anything peculiar in the pictures here, it is, perhaps, the special interest that Shakespeare seems to take in what we may call the unreality of the feeling of love in an imaginative nature. Romeo as he first appears, and, in a later play, Orsino, are examples of this. They are perfectly sincere, of course, but neither of them is really in love with a woman; each is in love with the state of being in love. This state is able to attach itself to a particular object, but it is not induced by the particular qualities of that object; it is more a dream than a passion, and can melt away without carrying any of the lover's heart with it; and in that sense it is unreal. This weakness, no doubt, is not confined to imaginative natures, but they may well be specially disposed to it (as Shelley was), and Shakespeare may have drawn it from his own experience. The suspicion is strengthened when we think of *Richard II.* In Richard this imaginative weakness is exhibited again, though not in relation to love. He luxuriates in images of his royal majesty, of the angels who guard his divine right, and of his own pathetic and almost sacred sufferings. The images are not insincere, and yet they are like dreams, for they refuse to touch earth and to connect themselves either with his past misdeeds or with the actions he ought now to perform. A strain of a similar weakness appears again in Hamlet, though only as one strain in a much more deep and complex nature. But this is not a common theme in poetry, much less in dramatic poetry.¹

¹ There is nothing of this semi-reality, of course, in the *passion* of love as portrayed, for example, in men so different as Orlando, Othello, Antony, Troilus, whose love for Cressida resembles that of Romeo for Juliet. What I have said of Romeo's 'love' for Rosaline corresponds roughly with Coleridge's view; and, without subscribing to all of Coleridge's remarks, I believe he was right in finding an intentional contrast between this feeling and the passion that displaces it (though it does not follow that the feeling would not have become a genuine passion if Rosaline had been kind). Nor do I understand the notion

To come to our second question. When Shakespeare painted Cressida or described her through the mouth of Ulysses ('O these encounterers,' etc.), or, again, when he portrayed the love of Antony for Cleopatra, was he using his personal experience? To answer that he *must* have done so would be as ridiculous as to argue that Iago must be a portrait of himself; and the two plays contain nothing which, by itself, would justify us even in thinking that he probably did so. But we have the series of sonnets about the dark lady; and if we accept the sonnets to the friend as to some considerable extent based on fact and expressive of personal feelings, how can we refuse to take the others on the same footing? Even if the stories of the two series were not intertwined, we should have no ground for treating the two in different ways, unless we could say that external evidence, or the general impression we derive from Shakespeare's works, forbids us to believe that he could ever have been entangled in an intrigue like that implied in the second series, or have felt and thought in the manner there portrayed. Being unable to say this, I am compelled, most regretfully, to hold it probable that this series is, in the main, based on personal experience. And I say 'most regretfully,' not merely because one would regret to think that Shakespeare was the victim of a Cressida or even the lover of a Cleopatra, but because the story implied in these

that Coleridge's view is refuted and even rendered ridiculous by the mere fact that Shakespeare found the Rosaline story in Brooke (Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 7th ed., illustrative note 2). Was he compelled then to use whatever he found? Was it his practice to do so? The question is always *why* he used what he found, and *how*. Coleridge's view of this matter, it need hardly be said, is far from indisputable; but it must be judged by our knowledge of Shakespeare's mind and not of his material alone. I may add, as I have referred to Halliwell-Phillipps, that Shakespeare made changes in the story he found; that it is arbitrary to assume (not that it matters) that Coleridge, who read Steevens, was unaware of Shakespeare's use of Brooke; and that Brooke was by no means a 'wretched poetaster.'

sonnets is of quite another kind. They leave, on the whole, a very disagreeable impression. We cannot compare it with the impressions produced, for example, by the 'heathen' spirit of Goethe's *Roman Elegies*, or by the passion of Shakespeare's Antony. In these two cases, widely dissimilar of course, we may speak of 'immorality,' but we are not discomfited, much less disgusted. The feeling and the attitude are poetic, whole-hearted, and in one case passionate in the extreme. But the state of mind expressed in the sonnets about the dark lady is half-hearted, often prosaic, and never worthy of the name of passion. It is uneasy, dissatisfied, dis-tempered, the state of mind of a man who despises his 'passion' and its object and himself, but, standing intellectually far above it, still has not resolution to end it, and only pains us by his gross and joyless jests. In *Troilus and Cressida*—not at all in the portrayal of Troilus's love, but in the atmosphere of the drama—we seem to trace a similar mood of dissatisfaction, and of intellectual but practically impotent contempt.

In this connection it is natural to think of the 'unhappy period' which has so often been surmised in Shakespeare's life. There is not time here to expand the summary remarks made elsewhere on this subject; but I may refer a little more fully to a persistent impression left on my mind by writings which we have reason to assign to the years 1602-6.¹ There is surely something unusual in their tone regarding certain 'vices of the blood,' regarding drunkenness and sexual corruption. It does not lie in Shakespeare's *view* of these vices, but in an undertone of disgust. Read Hamlet's language about the habitual drunkenness of his uncle, or even

¹ *Hamlet, Measure for Measure, Othello, Troilus and Cressida, King Lear, Timon of Athens*. See *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 79-85, 275-6. I should like to insist on the view there taken that the tragedies subsequent to *Lear* and *Timon* do not show the pressure of painful feelings.

Cassio's words about his casual excess; then think of the tone of *Henry IV.* or *Twelfth Night* or the *Tempest*; and ask if the difference is not striking. And if you are inclined to ascribe it wholly to the fact that *Hamlet* and *Othello* are tragedies, compare the passages in them with the scene on Pompey's galley in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The intent of that scene is terrible enough, but in the tone there is no more trace of disgust than in *Twelfth Night*. As to the other matter, what I refer to is not the transgression of lovers like Claudio and Juliet, nor even light-hearted irregularities like those of Cassio: here Shakespeare's speech has its habitual tone. But, when he is dealing with lechery and corruption, the undercurrent of disgust seems to become audible. Is it not true that in the plays from *Hamlet* to *Timon* that subject, in one shape or another, is continually before us; that the intensity of loathing in Hamlet's language about his mother's lust is unexampled in Shakespeare; that the treatment of the subject in *Measure for Measure*, though occasionally purely humorous, is on the whole quite unlike the treatment in *Henry IV.* or even in the brothel scenes of *Pericles*; ¹ that while *Troilus and Cressida* is full of disgust and contempt, there is not a trace of either in *Antony and Cleopatra*, though some of the jesting there is obscene enough; that this same tone is as plainly heard in the unquestioned parts of *Timon*; and that, while it is natural in *Timon* to inveigh against female lechery when he speaks to Alcibiades and his harlots, there is no apparent reason why Lear in his exalted madness should choose this subject for similar invectives? 'Pah! give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination'—it is a fainter echo of this exclamation that one seems to hear in the plays of those years. Of course I am not suggesting that it is

¹ It is not implied that these scenes are certainly Shakespeare's; but I see no sufficient ground for decisively rejecting them.

mainly due, or as regards drunkenness due in the least, to any private experience of Shakespeare's. It may have no connection whatever with that experience. It might well be connected with it only in so far as a man frequently wearied and depressed might be unusually sensitive to the ugly aspects of life. But, if we do not take the second series of sonnets to be purely fanciful, we shall think it probable that to some undefined extent it owed its origin to the experience depicted in them.¹

There remain the sonnets addressed to the friend. Even if it were possible to discuss the general question about them here, it would be needless; for I accept almost wholly, and in some points am greatly indebted to, the views put forward by Mr. Beeching in his admirable edition, to which I may therefore refer my hearers.² I intend only to state the main reason why I believe the sonnets to be, substantially, what they purport to be, and then to touch upon one or two of the points where they seem to throw light on Shakespeare's personality.

The sonnets to the friend are, so far as we know, unique in Renaissance sonnet literature in being a prolonged and varied record of the intense affection of an older friend for a younger, and of other feelings arising from their relations. They have no real parallel in any series imitative of Virgil's second Eclogue, or in occasional sonnets to patrons or patron-friends couched in the high-flown language of the time. The intensity of the feelings expressed, however, ought not, by itself, to convince us that

¹ That experience, certainly in part and probably wholly, belongs to an earlier time, since sonnets 138 and 144 were printed in the *Passionate Pilgrim*. But I see no difficulty in that. What bears little fruit in a normal condition of spirits may bear abundant fruit later, in moods of discouragement and exasperation induced largely by other causes.

² *The Sonnets of Shakespeare with an Introduction and Notes*; Ginn & Co., 1904.

they are personal. The author of the plays could, I make no doubt, have written the most intimate of these poems to a mere creature of his imagination and without ever having felt them except in imagination. Nor is there any but an aesthetic reason why he should not have done so if he had wished. But an aesthetic reason there is; and this is the decisive point. No capable poet, much less a Shakespeare, intending to produce a merely 'dramatic' series of poems, would dream of inventing a story like that of these sonnets, or, even if he did, of treating it as they treat it. The story is very odd and unattractive. Such capacities as it has are but slightly developed. It is left obscure, and some of the poems are unintelligible to us because they contain allusions of which we can make nothing. Now all this is perfectly natural if the story is substantially a real story of Shakespeare himself and of certain other persons; if the sonnets were written from time to time as the relations of the persons changed, and sometimes in reference to particular incidents; and if they were written *for* one or more of these persons (far the greater number for only one), and perhaps in a few cases for other friends,—written, that is to say, for people who knew the details and incidents of which we are ignorant. But it is all unnatural, well-nigh incredibly unnatural, if, with the most sceptical critics, we regard the sonnets as a free product of mere imagination.¹

Assuming, then, that the persons of the story, with their relations, are real, I would add only two remarks about the friend. In the first place, Mr. Beeching seems to me right in denying that there is sufficient evidence of his standing to Shakespeare and the 'rival' poet or poets in the position of a literary patron; while, even if he did, it appears to

¹ I find that Mr. Beeching, in the Stratford Town edition of Shakespeare (1907), has also urged these considerations.

me quite impossible to take the language of many of the sonnets as that of interested flattery. And in the second place I should be inclined to push even further Mr. Beeching's view on another point. It is clear that the young man was considerably superior to the actor-dramatist in social position; but any gentleman would be so, and there is nothing to prove that he was more than a gentleman of some note, more than plain 'Mr. W. H.' (for these, on the obvious though not compulsory interpretation of the dedication, seem to have been his initials). It is remarkable besides that, while the earlier sonnets show much deference, the later show very little, so little that, when the writer, finding that he has pained his young friend by neglecting him, begs to be forgiven, he writes almost, if not quite, as an equal. Read, for example, sonnets 109, 110, 120, and ask whether it is probable that Shakespeare is addressing here a great nobleman. It seems therefore most likely (though the question is not of much importance) that the sonnets are, to quote Meres's phrase,¹ his 'sonnets among his private friends.'

If then there is, as it appears, no obstacle of any magnitude to our taking the sonnets as substantially what they purport to be, we may naturally look in them for personal traits (and, indeed, to repeat a remark made earlier, we might still expect to find such traits even if we knew the sonnets to be purely dramatic). But in drawing inferences we have to bear in mind what is implied by the qualification 'substantially.' We have to remember that *some* of these poems may be mere exercises of art; that all of them are poems, and not letters, much less *affidavits*; that they are Elizabethan poems; that the Elizabethan language of deference, and also of affection, is to our minds habitually extravagant and

¹ I do not mean to imply that Meres necessarily refers to the sonnets we possess, or that all of these are likely to have been written by 1598.

fantastic;¹ and that in Elizabethan plays friends openly express their love for one another as Englishmen now rarely do. Allowance being made, however, on account of these facts, the sonnets will still leave two strong impressions—that the poet was exceedingly sensitive to the charm of beauty, and that his love for his friend was, at least at one time, a feeling amounting almost to adoration, and so intense as to be absorbing. Those who are surprised by the first of these traits must have read Shakespeare's dramas with very inactive minds, and I must add that they seem to be somewhat ignorant of human nature. We do not necessarily love best those of our relatives, friends, and acquaintances who please our eyes most; and we should look askance on anyone who regulated his behaviour chiefly by the standard of beauty; but most of us, I suppose, love any human being, of either sex and of any age, the better for being beautiful, and are not the least ashamed of the fact. It is further the case that men who are beginning, like the writer of the sonnets, to feel tired and old, are apt to feel an increased and special pleasure in the beauty of the young.² If we remember, in addition, what some critics appear constantly to forget, that Shakespeare was a particularly poetical being, we shall hardly be surprised that the beginning of this friendship seems to have been something like a falling in love; and, if we must needs praise and blame, we should also remember that it became a 'marriage of true minds.'³ And as to the intensity of the feeling expressed in the sonnets, we can easily believe it to be characteristic

¹ A fact to be remembered in regard to references to the social position of the friend.

■ Mr. Beeching's illustration of the friendship of the sonnets from the friendship of Gray and Bonstetten is worth pages of argument.

³ In 125 the poet repudiates the accusation that his friendship is too much based on beauty.

of the man who made Valentine and Proteus, Brutus and Cassius, Horatio and Hamlet; who painted that strangely moving portrait of Antonio, middle-aged, sad, and almost indifferent between life and death, but devoted to the young, brilliant spend-thrift Bassanio; and who portrayed the sudden compelling enchantment exercised by the young Sebastian over the Antonio of *Twelfth Night*. 'If you will not murder me for your love, let me be your servant.' Antonio is accused of piracy: he may lose his life if he is identified:

I have many enemies in Orsino's court,
But, come what may, I do adore thee so
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.

The adoration, the 'prostration,' of the writer of the sonnets is of one kind with this.

I do not remember what critic uses the word 'prostration.' It applies to Shakespeare's attitude only in some of the sonnets, but there it does apply, unless it is taken to suggest humiliation. *That* is the term used by Hallam, but chiefly in view of a particular point, namely the failure of the poet to 'resent,' though he 'felt and bewailed,' the injury done him in 'the seduction of his mistress.' Though I think we should substitute 'resent more strongly' for the mere 'resent,' I do not deny that the poet's attitude in this matter strikes us at first as surprising as well as unpleasant to contemplate. But Hallam's explanation of it as perhaps due to the exalted position of the friend, would make it much more than unpleasant; and his language seems to show that he, like many critics, did not fully imagine the situation. It is not easy to speak of it in public with the requisite frankness; but it is necessary to realise that, whatever the friend's rank might be, he and the poet were intimate friends; that, manifestly, it was rather the mistress who seduced the friend than the friend the mistress; and that she

was apparently a woman not merely of no reputation, but of such a nature that she might readily be expected to be mistress to two men at one and the same time. Anyone who realises this may call the situation 'humiliating' in one sense, and I cannot quarrel with him; but he will not call it 'humiliating' in respect of Shakespeare's relation to his friend; nor will he wonder much that the poet felt more pain than resentment at his friend's treatment of him. There is something infinitely stranger in a play of Shakespeare's, and it may be symptomatic. Ten Brink called attention to it. Proteus actually offers violence to Sylvia, a spotless lady and the true love of his friend Valentine; and Valentine not only forgives him at once when he professes repentance, but offers to resign Sylvia to him! The incident is to us so utterly preposterous that we find it hard to imagine how the audience stood it; but, even if we conjecture that Shakespeare adopted it from the story he was using, we can hardly suppose that it was so absurd to him as it is to us.¹ And it is not the Sonnets alone which lead us to surmise that forgiveness was particularly attractive to him, and the forgiveness of a friend much easier than resentment. From the Sonnets we gather—and there is nothing in the plays or elsewhere to contradict the impression—that he would not be slow to resent the criticisms, slanders, or injuries of strangers or the world, and that he bore himself towards them with a proud, if silent, self-sufficiency. But, we surmise, for anyone whom he loved

He carried anger as a flint bears fire;
Who, much enforced, shows a hasty spark
And straight is cold again;

and towards anyone so fondly loved as the friend of the Sonnets he was probably incapable of fierce or prolonged resentment.

¹This does not imply that the Sonnets are as early as the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and much less that they are earlier.

The Sonnets must not occupy us further; and I will not dwell on the indications they afford that Shakespeare sometimes felt bitterly both the social inferiority of his position as an actor,¹ and its influence on his own character; or that (as we have already conjectured) he may sometimes have played the fool in society, sometimes felt weary of life, and often was over-tired by work. It is time to pass on to a few hesitating conjectures about what may be called his tastes.

Some passages of his about music have become household words. It is not downright impossible that, like Bottom, having only a reasonable good ear, he liked best the tongs and the bones; that he wondered, with Benedick, how sheeps-guts should hale souls out of men's bodies; and that he wrote the famous lines in the *Merchant of Venice* and in *Twelfth Night* from mere observation and imagination. But it is futile to deal with scepticism run well-nigh mad, and certainly inaccessible to argument from the cases of poets whose tastes are matter of knowledge. Assuming therefore that Shakespeare was fond of music, I may draw attention to two points. Almost always he speaks of music as having a softening, tranquillising, or pensive influence. It lulls killing care and grief of heart to sleep. It soothes the sick and weary, and even makes them drowsy. Hamlet calls for it in his hysterical excitement after the success of the play scene. When it is hoped that Lear's long sleep will have carried his madness away, music is played as he awakes, apparently to increase the desired 'temperance.' It harmonises with the still and moonlit night, and the dreamy happiness of newly-

¹ This seems to be referred to in lines by John Davies of Hereford, reprinted in Ingleby's *Shakespeare's Centurie of Prayse*, second edition, pp. 58, 84, 94. In the first of these passages, dated 1603 (and perhaps in the second, 1609), there are signs that Davies had read Sonnet III, a fact to be noted with regard to the question of the chronology of the Sonnets.

wedded lovers. Almost all the rare allusions to lively or exciting music, apart from dancing, refer, I believe, to 'the lofty instruments of war.' These facts would almost certainly have a personal significance if Shakespeare were a more modern poet. Whether they have any, or have much, in an Elizabethan I do not venture to judge.

The second point is diminutive, but it may be connected with the first. The Duke in *Measure for Measure* observes that music often has

a charm

To make bad good and good provoke to harm.

If we ask how it should provoke good to harm, we may recall what was said (p. 326) of the weaknesses of some poetic natures, and that no one speaks more feelingly of music than Orsino; further, how he refers to music as 'the food of love,' and who it is that almost repeats the phrase.

Give me some music: music, moody food

Of us that trade in love:

—the words are Cleopatra's.¹ Did Shakespeare as he wrote them remember, I wonder, the dark lady to whose music he had listened (Sonnet 128)?

We should be greatly surprised to find in Shakespeare signs of the nineteenth century feeling for mountain scenery, but we can no more doubt that within certain limits he was sensitive to the beauty of nature than that he was fond of music.² The only

¹ 'Mistress Tearsheet' too 'would fain hear some music,' and 'Sneak's noise' had to be sent for (2 *Henry IV.*, II. iv. 12).

² It is tempting, though not safe, to infer from the *Tempest* and the great passage in *Pericles* that Shakespeare must have been in a storm at sea; but that he felt the poetry of a sea-storm is beyond all doubt. Few moments in the reading of his works are more overwhelming than that in which, after listening not without difficulty to the writer of the first two Acts of *Pericles*, suddenly, as the third opens, one hears the authentic voice:

Thou god of this great vast, rebuke these surges

That wash both heaven and hell. . . . The seaman's whistle

Is as a whisper in the ears of death,

Unheard.

Knowing that this is coming, I cannot stop to read the Prologue to
O.L.

question is whether we can guess at any preferences here. It is probably inevitable that the flowers most often mentioned should be the rose and the lily;¹ but hardly that the violet should come next and not far behind, and that the fragrance of the violet should be spoken of more often even than that of the rose, and, it seems, with special affection. This may be a fancy, and it will be thought a sentimental fancy too; but poets, like other people, may have favourite flowers; that of Keats, we happen to know, was the violet.

Again, if we may draw any conclusion from the frequency and the character of the allusions, the lark held for Shakespeare the place of honour among birds; and the lines,

Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus gins arise,

may suggest one reason for this. The lark, as several other collocations show, was to him the bird of joy that welcomes the sun; and it can hardly be doubted that dawn and early morning was the time of day that most appealed to him. That he felt the beauty of night and of moonlight is obvious; but we find very little to match the lines in *Richard II.*,

The setting sun, and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last;

and still less to prove that he felt the magic of

Act III., though I believe Shakespeare wrote it. How it can be imagined that he did more than touch up Acts I. and II. passes my comprehension.

I may call attention to another point. Unless I mistake, there is nothing in Shakespeare's authorities, as known to us, which corresponds with the feeling of Timon's last speech, beginning,

Come not to me again: but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood:

■ feeling made more explicit in the final speech of Alcibiades.

¹ The lily seems to be in almost all cases the Madonna lily. It is very doubtful whether the lily of the valley is referred to at all

evening twilight, the 'heavenliest hour' of a famous passage in *Don Juan*. There is a wonderful line in Sonnet 132,

And that full star that ushers in the even,

but I remember little else of the same kind. Shakespeare, as it happens, uses the word 'twilight' only once, and in an unforgettable passage :

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west :
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.

And this feeling, though not often so solemn, is on the whole the prevailing sentiment in the references to sunset and evening twilight. It corresponds with the analogy between the times of the day and the periods of human life. The sun sets from the weariness of age ; but he rises in the strength and freshness of youth, firing the proud tops of the eastern pines, and turning the hills and the sea into burnished gold, while jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops, and the lark sings at the gate of heaven. In almost all the familiar lines about dawn one seems to catch that 'indescribable gusto' which Keats heard in Kean's delivery of the words :

Stir with the lark to-morrow, gentle Norfolk.

Two suggestions may be ventured as to Shakespeare's feelings towards four-footed animals. The first must be very tentative. We do not expect in a writer of that age the sympathy with animals which is so beautiful a trait in much of the poetry of the last hundred and fifty years. And I can remember in Shakespeare scarcely any sign of *fondness* for an animal,—not even for a horse, though he wrote so often of horses. But there are rather frequent, if casual, expressions of pity, in references, for example, to the hunted hare or stag, or to the

spurred horse:¹ and it may be questioned whether the passage in *As You Like It* about the wounded deer is quite devoid of personal significance. No doubt Shakespeare thought the tears of Jaques sentimental; but he put a piece of himself into Jaques. And, besides, it is not Jaques alone who dislikes the killing of the deer, but the Duke; and we may surely hear some tone of Shakespeare's voice in the Duke's speech about the life in the forest. Perhaps we may surmise that, while he enjoyed field-sports, he felt them at times to be out of tune with the harmony of nature.

On the second point, I regret to say, I can feel no doubt. Shakespeare did not care for dogs, as Homer did; he even disliked them, as Goethe did. Of course he can write eloquently about the points of hounds and the music of their voices in the chase, and humorously about Launce's love for his cur and even about the cur himself; but this is no more significant on the one side than is his conventional use of 'dog' as a term of abuse on the other. What is significant is the absence of allusion, or (to be perfectly accurate) of sympathetic allusion, to the characteristic virtues of dogs, and the abundance of allusions of an insulting kind. Shakespeare has observed and recorded, in some instances profusely, every vice that I can think of in an ill-conditioned dog. He fawns and cringes and flatters, and then bites the hand that caressed him; he is a coward who attacks you from behind, and barks at you the more the farther off you go; he knows neither charity, humanity, nor gratitude; as he flatters power and wealth, so he takes

¹ But there is something disappointing, and even estranging, in Sonnet 50, which, promising to show a real sympathy, cheats us in the end. I may observe, without implying that the fact has any personal significance, that the words about 'the poor beetle that we tread upon' are given to a woman (Isabella), and that it is Marina who says:

I trod upon a worm against my will,
But I wept for it.

part against the poor and unfashionable, and if fortune turns against you so does he.¹ The plays swarm with these charges. Whately's exclamation—uttered after a College meeting or a meeting of Chapter, I forget which—'The more I see of men, the more I like dogs,' would never have been echoed by Shakespeare. The things he most loathed in men he found in dogs too. And yet all this might go for nothing if we could set anything of weight against it. But what can we set? Nothing whatever, so far as I remember, except a recognition of courage in bear-baiting, bull-baiting mastiffs. For I cannot quote as favourable to the spaniel the appeal of Helena:

I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.

This may show that Shakespeare was alive to the baseness of a spaniel-owner, but not that he appreciated that self-less affection which he describes. It is more probable that it irritated him, as it does many men still; and, as for its implying fidelity, there is no reference, I believe, to the fidelity of the dog in the whole of his works, and he chooses the spaniel himself as a symbol of flattery and ingratitude: his Cæsar talks of

Knee-crooked court'sies and base spaniel-fawning;

his Antony exclaims:

the hearts
That spaniel'd me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
On blossoming Cæsar.

To all that he loved most in men he was blind in dogs. And then we call him universal!

¹ Three times in one drama Shakespeare refers to this detestable trait. See *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 268, where I should like to qualify still further the sentence containing the qualification 'on the whole.' Good judges, at least, assure me that I have admitted too much against the dog.

This line of research into Shakespeare's tastes might be pursued a good deal further, but we must return to weightier matters. We saw that he could sympathise with anyone who erred and suffered from impulse, affections of the blood, or even such passions as were probably no danger to himself,—ambition, for instance, and pride. Can we learn anything more about him by observing virtues or types of character with which he appears to feel little sympathy, though he may approve them? He certainly does not show this imperfect sympathy towards self-control; we seem to feel even a special liking for Brutus, and again for Horatio, who has suffered much, is quietly patient, and has mastered both himself and fortune. But, not to speak of coldly selfish natures, he seems averse to bloodless people, those who lack, or those who have deadened, the natural desires for joy and sympathy, and those who tend to be precise.¹ Nor does he appear to be drawn to men who, as we say, try to live or to act on principle; nor to those who aim habitually at self-improvement; nor yet to the saintly type of character. I mean, not that he *could* not sympathise with them, but that they did not attract him. Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, is drawn, of course, with understanding, but, it seems to me, with little sympathy. Her readiness to abandon her pleading for Claudio, out of horror at his sin and a sense of the justice of Angelo's reasons for refusing his pardon, is doubtless in character; but if Shakespeare had sympathised more with her at this point, so should we; while, as it is, we are tempted to exclaim,

She loves him not, she wants the natural touch;
and perhaps if Shakespeare had liked her better and
had not regarded her with some irony, he would

¹ Nor can I recall any sign of liking, or even approval, of that 'prudent, *cautious*, self-control' which, according to a passage in Burns, is 'wisdom's root.'

not have allowed himself, for mere convenience, to degrade her by marrying her to the Duke. Brutus and Cordelia, on the other hand, are drawn with the fullest imaginative sympathy, and they, it may be said, are characters of principle; but then (even if Cordelia could be truly so described) they are also intensely affectionate, and by no means inhumanly self-controlled.

The mention of Brutus may carry us somewhat farther. Shakespeare's Brutus kills Cæsar, not because Cæsar aims at absolute power, but because Brutus fears that absolute power may make him cruel. That is not Plutarch's idea, it is Shakespeare's. He could fully sympathise with the gentleness of Brutus, with his entire superiority to private aims and almost entire freedom from personal susceptibilities, and even with his resolution to sacrifice his friend; but he could not so sympathise with mere horror of monarchy or absolute power. And now extend this a little. Can you imagine Shakespeare an enthusiast for an 'idea'; a devotee of divine right, or the rights of Parliament, or any particular form of government in Church or State; a Fifth Monarchy man, or a Quaker, or a thick-and-thin adherent of any compact, exclusive, abstract creed, even if it were as rational and noble as Mazzini's? This type of mind, even at its best, is alien from his. Scott is said, rightly or wrongly, to have portrayed the Covenanters without any deep understanding of them; it would have been the same with Shakespeare. I am not praising him, or at least not merely praising him. One may even suggest that on this side he was limited. In any age he would have been safe against fanaticism and one-sided ideas; but perhaps in no age would he have been the man to insist with the necessary emphasis on those one-sided ideas which the moment may need, or even to give his whole heart to men who join a forlorn hope or are martyred for a faith.

And though it is rash to suggest that anything in the way of imagination was beyond his reach, perhaps the legend of Faust, with his longings for infinite power and knowledge and enjoyment of beauty, would have suited him less well than Marlowe; and if he had written on the subject that Cervantes took, his Don Quixote would have been at least as laughable as the hero we know, but would he have been a soul so ideally noble and a figure so profoundly pathetic?

This would be the natural place to discuss Shakespeare's politics if we were to discuss them at all. But even if the question whether he shows any interest in the political differences of his time, or any sympathies or antipathies in regard to them, admits of an answer, it could be answered only by an examination of details; and I must pass it by, and offer only the briefest remarks on a wider question. Shakespeare, as we might expect, shows no sign of believing in what is sometimes called a political 'principle.' The main ideas which, consciously or unconsciously, seem to govern or emerge from his presentation of state affairs, might perhaps be put thus. National welfare is the end of politics, and the criterion by which political actions are to be judged. It implies of necessity 'degree'; that is, differences of position and function in the members of the body politic.¹ And the first requisites of national welfare are the observance of this degree, and the concordant performance of these functions in the general interest. But there appear to be no further absolute principles than these: beyond them all is relative to the particular case and its particular conditions. We find no hint, for example, in *Julius Caesar* that Shakespeare regarded a monarchical form of government as intrinsically better than a republican, or *vice versa*; no trace in *Richard II.* that the author shares the king's belief in his

¹ The *locus classicus*, of course, is *Troilus and Cressida*, i. iii. 75 ff.

inviolable right, or regards Bolingbroke's usurpation as justifiable. We perceive, again, pretty clearly in several plays a dislike and contempt of demagogues, and an opinion that mobs are foolish, fickle, and ungrateful. But these are sentiments which the most determined of believers in democracy, if he has sense, may share; and if he thinks that the attitude of aristocrats like Volumnia and Coriolanus is inhuman and as inexcusable as that of the mob, and that a mob is as easily led right as wrong and has plenty of good nature in it, he has abundant ground for holding that Shakespeare thought so too. That Shakespeare greatly liked and admired the typical qualities of the best kind of aristocrat seems highly probable; but then this taste has always been compatible with a great variety of political opinions. It is interesting but useless to wonder what his own opinions would have been at various periods of English history: perhaps the only thing we can be pretty sure of in regard to them is that they would never have been extreme, and that he would never have supposed his opponents to be entirely wrong.

We have tried to conjecture the impulses, passions, and errors with which Shakespeare could easily sympathise, and the virtues and types of character which he may have approved without much sympathy. It remains to ask whether we can notice tendencies and vices to which he felt any special antipathy; and it is obvious and safe to point to those most alien to a gentle, open, and free nature, the vices of a cold and hard disposition, self-centred and incapable of fusion with others. Passing over, again, the plainly hideous forms or extremes of such vice, as we see them in characters like Richard III., Iago, Goneril and Regan, or the Queen in *Cymbeline*, we seem to detect a particular aversion to certain vices which have the common mark of baseness; for instance, servility and flattery

(especially when deliberate and practised with a view to self-advancement), feigning in friendship, and ingratitude. Shakespeare's *animus* against the dog arises from the attribution of these vices to him, and against them in men are directed the invectives which seem to have a personal ring. There appears to be traceable also a feeling of a special, though less painful, kind against unmercifulness. I do not mean, of course, cruelty, but unforgivingness, and even the tendency to prefer justice to mercy. From no other dramatic author, probably, could there be collected such prolonged and heart-felt praises of mercy as from Shakespeare. He had not at all strongly, I think, that instinct and love of justice and retribution which in many men are so powerful; but Prospero's words,

they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a jot further,

came from his heart. He perceived with extreme clearness the connection of acts with their consequences; but his belief that in this sense 'the gods are just' was accompanied by the strongest feeling that forgiveness ought to follow repentance, and (if I may so put it) his favourite petition was the one that begins 'Forgive us our trespasses.' To conclude, I have fancied that he shows an unusual degree of disgust at slander and dislike of censoriousness; and where he speaks in the Sonnets of those who censured him he betrays an exceptionally decided feeling that a man's offences are his own affair and not the world's.¹

Some of the vices which seem to have been particularly odious to Shakespeare have, we may notice, a special connection with prosperity and power. Men feign and creep and flatter to please

¹ Of all the evils inflicted by man on man those chosen for mention in the dirge in *Cymbeline*, one of the last plays, are the frown o' the great, the tyrant's stroke, slander, censure rash.

the powerful and to win their own way to ease or power; and they envy and censure and slander their competitors in the race; and when they succeed, they are ungrateful to their friends and helpers and patrons; and they become hard and unmerciful, and despise and bully those who are now below them. So, perhaps, Shakespeare said to himself in those years when, as we imagine, melancholy and embitterment often overclouded his sky, though they did not obscure his faith in goodness and much less his intellectual vision. And prosperity and power, he may have added, come less frequently by merit than by those base arts or by mere fortune. The divorce of goodness and power was, to Shelley, the 'woe of the world'; if we substitute for 'goodness' the wider word 'merit,' we may say that this divorce, with the evil bred by power, is to Shakespeare also the root of bitterness. This fact, presented in its extreme form of the appalling cruelty of the prosperous, and the heartrending suffering of the defenceless, forms the problem of his most tremendous drama. We have no reason to surmise that his own sufferings were calamitous; and the period which seems to be marked by melancholy and embitterment was one of outward, or at least financial, prosperity; but nevertheless we can hardly doubt that he felt on the small scale of his own life the influence of that divorce of power and merit. His complaint against Fortune, who had so ill provided for his life, runs through the Sonnets. Even if we could regard as purely conventional the declarations that his verses would make his friend immortal, it is totally impossible that he can have been unaware of the gulf between his own gifts and those of others, or can have failed to feel the disproportion between his position and his mind. Hamlet had never experienced

the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

and that make the patient soul weary of life; the man who had experienced them was the writer of Sonnet 66, who cried for death because he was tired with beholding

desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,

—a beggarly soul flaunting in brave array. Neither had Hamlet felt in his own person 'the insolence of office'; but the actor had doubtless felt it often enough, and we can hardly err in hearing his own voice in dramatic expressions of wonder and contempt at the stupid pride of mere authority and at men's slavish respect for it. Two examples will suffice. 'Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar, and the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst behold the great image of authority. A dog's obeyed in office': so says Lear, when madness has cleared his vision, and indignation makes the Timon-like verses that follow. The other example is almost too famous for quotation but I have a reason for quoting it:

man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

It is Isabella who says that; but it is scarcely in character; Shakespeare himself is speaking.¹

It is with great hesitation that I hazard a few words on Shakespeare's religion. Any attempt to penetrate his reserve on this subject may appear a crowning impertinence; and, since his dramas are almost exclusively secular, any impressions we

¹ Having written these paragraphs, I should like to disclaim the belief that Shakespeare was habitually deeply discontented with his position in life.

may form must here be even more speculative than usual. Yet it is scarcely possible to read him much without such speculations; and there are at least some theories which may confidently be dismissed. It cannot be called absolutely impossible that Shakespeare was indifferent to music and to the beauty of Nature, and yet the idea is absurd; and in the same way it is barely possible, and yet it is preposterous, to suppose that he was an ardent and devoted atheist or Brownist or Roman Catholic, and that all the indications to the contrary are due to his artfulness and determination not to get into trouble. There is no absurdity, on the other hand, nor of necessity anything hopeless, in the question whether there are signs that he belonged to this or that church, and was inclined to one mode of thought within it rather than to another. Only the question is scarcely worth asking for our present purpose, unless there is some reason to believe that he took a keen interest in these matters. Suppose, for example, that we had ground to accept a tradition that he 'died a papist,' this would not tell us much about him unless we had also ground to think that he lived a papist, and that his faith went far into his personality. But in fact we receive from his writings, it appears to me, a rather strong impression that he concerned himself little, if at all, with differences of doctrine or church government.¹ And we may go further. Have we not reason to surmise that he was not, in the distinctive sense of the word, a religious man—a man, that is to say, whose feelings and actions are constantly and strongly influenced by thoughts of his relation to an object of worship? If Shakespeare had been such a man, is it credible that we should find nothing in tradition or in his works to indicate the fact; and is it likely

¹Allusions to puritans show at most what we take almost for granted, that he did not like precisians or people hostile to the stage.

that we should find in his works some things that we do find there?¹

Venturing with much doubt a little farther I will put together certain facts and impressions without at once drawing any conclusion from them. Almost all the speeches that can be called pronouncedly religious and Christian in phraseology and spirit are placed in the mouths of persons to whom they are obviously appropriate, either from their position (*e.g.* bishops, friars, nuns), or from what Shakespeare found in histories (*e.g.* Henry IV., V., and VI.), or for some other plain reason. We cannot build, therefore, on these speeches in the least. On the other hand (except, of course, where they are hypocritical or politic), we perceive in Shakespeare's tone in regard to them not the faintest trace of dislike or contempt; nor can we find a trace anywhere of such feelings, or of irreverence, towards Christian ideas, institutions, or customs (mere humorous irreverence is not relevant here); and in the case of 'sympathetic' characters, living in Christian times but not in any decided sense religious, no disposition is visible to suppress or ignore their belief in, and use of, religious ideas. Some characters, again, Christian or heathen, who appear to be drawn with rather marked sympathy, have strong, if simple, religious convictions (*e.g.* Horatio, Edgar, Hermione); and in others, of whom so much can hardly be said, but who strike many readers, rightly or wrongly, as having a good deal of Shakespeare in

¹In the Sonnets, for example, there is an almost entire absence of definitely religious thought or feeling. The nearest approach to it is in Sonnet 146 ('Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth'), where, however, there is no allusion to a divine law or judge. According to Sonnet 129, lust in action is

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame;

but no word shows that it is also felt as alienation from God. It must be added that in 108 and 110 there are references to the Lord's Prayer and, perhaps, to the First Commandment, from which a decidedly religious Christian would perhaps have shrunk. Of course I am not saying that we can draw any *necessary* inference from these facts.

them (*e.g.* Romeo and Hamlet), we observe a quiet but deep sense that they and other men are neither their own masters nor responsible only to themselves and other men, but are in the hands of 'Providence' or guiding powers 'above.'¹

To this I will add two remarks. To every one, I suppose, certain speeches sound peculiarly personal. Perhaps others may share my feeling about Hamlet's words :

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will ;

and about those other words of his :

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy ;

and about the speech of Prospero ending, 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on.'² On the other hand, we observe that Hamlet seems to have arrived at that conviction as to the 'divinity' after reflection, and that, while he usually speaks as one who accepts the received Christian ideas, yet, when meditating

¹ It is only this 'quiet but deep sense' that is significant. No inference can be drawn from the fact that the mere belief in powers above seems to be taken as a matter of course in practically all the characters, good and bad alike. On the other hand there may well be something symptomatic in the apparent absence of interest in theoretical disbelief in such powers and in the immortality of the soul. I have observed elsewhere that the atheism of Aaron does not increase the probability that the conception of the character is Shakespeare's.

■ With the first compare, what to me has, though more faintly, the same ring, Hermione's

If powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do :

with the second, Helena's

It is not so with Him that all things knows
As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows ;
But most it is presumption in us when
The help of heaven we count the act of men :

followed soon after by Lafeu's remark :

They say miracles are past ; and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.

profoundly, he appears to ignore them.¹ In the same way the Duke in *Measure for Measure* is for the most part, and necessarily, a Christian; yet nobody would guess it from the great speech, 'Be absolute for death,' addressed by a supposed friar to a youth under sentence to die, yet containing not a syllable about a future life.²

Without adducing more of the endless but baffling material for a conclusion, I will offer the result left on my mind, and, merely for the sake of brevity, will state it with hardly any of the qualifications it doubtless needs. Shakespeare, I imagine, was not, in the sense assigned to the word some minutes ago, a religious man. Nor was it natural to him to regard good and evil, better and worse, habitually from a theological point of view. But (this appears certain) he had a lively and serious sense of 'conscience,' of the pain of self-reproach and self-condemnation, and of the torment to which this pain might rise.³ He was not in the least disposed to regard conscience as somehow illusory or a human invention, but on the contrary thought of it (I use the most non-committal phrase I can find) as connected with the power that rules the world and is not escapable by man. He realised very fully and felt very keenly, after his youth was past

¹ It is worth noting that the reference, which appears in the First Quarto version of 'To be or not to be,' to 'an everlasting judge,' disappears in the revised versions.

² The suggested inference, of course, is that this speech, thus out of character, and Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' (though that is in character), show us Shakespeare's own mind. It has force, I think, but not compulsory force. The topics of these speeches are, in the old sense of the word, commonplaces. Shakespeare may have felt, Here is my chance to show what I can do with certain feelings and thoughts of supreme interest to men of all times and places and modes of belief. It would not follow from this that they are not 'personal,' but any inference to a non-acceptance of received religious ideas would be much weakened. ('All the world's a stage' is a patent example of the suggested elaboration of a commonplace.)

³ What actions in particular *his* conscience approved and disapproved is another question and one not relevant here.

and at certain times of stress, the sufferings and wrongs of men, the strength of evil, the hideousness of certain forms of it, and its apparent incurability in certain cases. And he must sometimes have felt all this as a terrible problem. But, however he may have been tempted, and may have yielded, to exasperation and even despair, he never doubted that it is best to be good; felt more and more that one must be patient and must forgive;¹ and probably maintained unbroken a conviction, practical if not formulated, that to be good is to be at peace with that unescapable power. But it is unlikely that he attempted to theorise further on the nature of the power. All was for him, in the end, mystery; and, while we have no reason whatever to attribute to him a belief in the ghosts and oracles he used in his dramas, he had no inclination to play the spy on God or to limit his power by our notions of it. That he had dreams and ponderings about the mystery such as he never put into the mouths of actors I do not doubt; but I imagine they were no more than dreams and ponderings and movings about in worlds unrealised.

Whether to this 'religion' he joined a more or less conventional acceptance of some or all of the usual Christian ideas, it is impossible to tell. There is no great improbability to me in the idea that he did not, but it is more probable to me that he did,—that, in fact, though he was never so tormented as Hamlet, his position in this matter was, at least in middle life (and he never reached old age), much like Hamlet's. If this were so it might naturally happen that, as he grew older and wearier of labour, and perhaps of the tumult of pleasure and thought and pain, his more personal religion, the natural piety which seems to gain in weight and serenity in the latest plays, came to be more closely joined with

¹ This does not at all imply to Shakespeare, so far as we see, that evil is never to be forcibly resisted.

Christian ideas. But I can find no clear indications that this did happen; and though some have believed that they discovered these ideas displayed in full, though not explicitly, in the *Tempest*, I am not able to hear there more than the stream of Shakespeare's own 'religion' moving with its fullest volume and making its deepest and most harmonious music.¹

This lecture must end, though its subject is endless, and I will touch on only one point more,—one that may to some extent recall and connect the scattered suggestions I have offered.

If we were obliged to answer the question which of Shakespeare's plays contains, not indeed the fullest picture of his mind, but the truest expression of his nature and habitual temper, unaffected by special causes of exhilaration or gloom, I should be disposed to choose *As You Like It*. It wants, to go no further, the addition of a touch of Sir Toby or Falstaff, and the ejection of its miraculous conversions of ill-disposed characters. But the misbehaviour of Fortune, and the hardness and ingratitude of men, form the basis of its plot, and are a frequent topic of complaint. And, on the other hand, he who is reading it has a smooth brow and smiling lips, and a heart that murmurs,

Happy is your grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style.

¹ I do not mean to reject the idea that in some passages in the *Tempest* Shakespeare, while he wrote them with a dramatic purpose, also thought of himself. It seems to me likely. And if so, there *may* have been such a thought in the words,

And thence retire me to my Milan, where
Every third thought shall be my grave;

and also in those lines about prayer and pardon which close the Epilogue, and to my ear come with a sudden effect of great seriousness, contrasting most strangely with their context. If they *had* a grave and personal under-meaning it cannot have been intended for the audience, which would take the prayer as addressed to itself.

And it is full not only of sweetness, but of romance, fun, humour of various kinds, delight in the oddities of human nature, love of modesty and fidelity and high spirit and patience, dislike of scandal and censure, contemplative curiosity, the feeling that in the end we are all merely players, together with a touch of the feeling that

Then is there mirth in heaven
When earthly things made even
Atone together.

And, finally, it breathes the serene holiday mood of escape from the toil, competition, and corruption of city and court into the sun and shadow and peace of the country, where one can be idle and dream and meditate and sing, and pursue or watch the deer as the fancy takes one, and make love or smile at lovers according to one's age.¹

If, again, the question were put to us, which of Shakespeare's characters reveals most of his personality, the majority of those who consented to give an answer would answer 'Hamlet.' This impression may be fanciful, but it is difficult to think it wholly so, and, speaking for those who share it, I will try to trace some of its sources. There is a good deal of Shakespeare that is not in Hamlet. But Hamlet, we think, is the only character in Shakespeare who could possibly have composed his plays (though it appears unlikely, from his verses to Ophelia, that he could have written the best songs). Into Hamlet's mouth are put what are evidently Shakespeare's own views on drama and acting. Hamlet alone, among the great serious characters, can be called a humorist. When in some trait of another character we seem to touch Shakespeare's

¹ It may be added that *As You Like It*, though idyllic, is not so falsely idyllic as some critics would make it. It is based, we may roughly say, on a contrast between court and country; but those who inhale virtue from the woodland are courtiers who bring virtue with them, and the country has its churlish masters and unkind or uncouth maidens.

personality, we are frequently reminded of Hamlet.¹ When in a profound reflective speech we hear Shakespeare's voice, we usually hear Hamlet's too, and his peculiar humour and turns of phrase appear unexpectedly in persons otherwise unlike him and unlike one another. The most melancholy group of Sonnets (71-74) recalls Hamlet at once, here and there recalls even his words; and he and the writer of Sonnet 66 both recount in a list the ills that make men long for death. And then Hamlet 'was indeed honest and of an open and free nature'; sweet-tempered and modest, yet not slow to resent calumny or injury; of a serious but not a melancholy disposition; and the lover of his friend. And, with these traits, we remember his poet ecstasy at the glory of earth and sky and the marvellous endowments of man; his eager affectionate response to everything noble or sweet in human nature; his tendency to dream and to live in the world of his own mind; his liability to sudden vehement emotion, and his admiration for men whose blood and judgment are better commingled; the overwhelming effect of disillusionment upon him; his sadness, fierceness, bitterness and cynicism. All this, and more: his sensitiveness to the call of duty; his longing to answer to it, and his anguish over his strange delay; the conviction gathering in his tortured soul that man's purposes and failures are divinely shaped to ends beyond his vision; his incessant meditation, and his sense that there are mysteries which no meditation can fathom; nay, even little traits like his recourse to music to calm his excitement, or his feeling on the one hand that the peasant should not tread on the courtier's heels, and on the other that the mere courtier is spacious in the possession of dirt—all this, I say, corresponds with our impression of Shakespeare, or rather of characteristic traits in Shakespeare, probably here

¹ This has been strongly urged and fully illustrated by Mr. Harris.

and there a good deal heightened, and mingled with others not characteristic of Shakespeare at all. And if this is more than fancy, it may explain to us why Hamlet is the most fascinating character, and the most inexhaustible, in all imaginative literature. What else should he be, if the world's greatest poet, who was able to give almost the reality of nature to creations totally unlike himself, put his own soul straight into this creation, and when he wrote Hamlet's speeches wrote down his own heart?¹

1904.

¹ It may be suggested that, in the catalogue above, I should have mentioned that imaginative 'unreality' in love referred to on p. 326. But I do not see in Hamlet either this, or any sign that he took Ophelia for an Imogen or even a Juliet, though naturally he was less clearly aware of her deficiencies than Shakespeare.

I may add, however, another item to the catalogue. We do not feel that the problems presented to most of the tragic heroes could have been fatal to Shakespeare himself. The immense breadth and clearness of his intellect would have saved him from the fate of Othello, Troilus, or Antony. But we do feel, I think, and he himself may have felt, that he could not have coped with Hamlet's problem; and there is no improbability in the idea that he may have experienced in some degree the melancholia of his hero.

SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRE AND
AUDIENCE.

SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRE AND AUDIENCE.

WHY should we concern ourselves with Shakespeare's theatre and audience? The vast majority of his readers since the Restoration have known nothing about them, and have enjoyed his plays enormously. And if they have enjoyed without fully understanding, it was for want of imagination and of knowledge of human nature, and not from ignorance of the conditions under which his plays were produced. At any rate, such ignorance does not exclude us from the *soul* of Shakespearean drama, any more than from the soul of Homeric epic or Athenian tragedy; and it is the soul that counts and endures. For the rest, we all know that Shakespeare's time was rough, indecorous, and inexpert in regard to machinery; and so we are prepared for coarse speech and primitive stage-arrangements, and we make allowance for them without thinking about the matter. Antiquarians may naturally wish to know more; but what more is needed for intelligent enjoyment of the plays?

I have begun with these questions because I sympathise with their spirit. Everything I am going to speak of in this lecture is comparatively unimportant for the appreciation of that which is most vital in Shakespeare; and if I were allowed my choice between an hour's inspection of a performance at the Globe and a glimpse straight into his mind when he

was planning the *Tempest*, I should not hesitate which to choose. Nevertheless, to say nothing of the intrinsic interest of antiquarian knowledge, we cannot make a clear division between the soul and body, or the eternal and the perishable, in works of art. Nor can we lay the finger on a line which separates that which has poetic interest from that which has none. Nor yet can we assume that any knowledge of Shakespeare's theatre and audience, however trivial it may appear, may not help us to appreciate, or save us from misapprehending, the 'soul' of a play or a scene. If our own souls were capacious and vivid enough, every atom of information on these subjects, or again on the material he used in composing, would so assist us. The danger of devotion to such knowledge lies merely in our weakness. Research, though toilsome, is easy; imaginative vision, though delightful, is difficult; and we may be tempted to prefer the first. Or we note that in a given passage Shakespeare has used what he found in his authority; and we excuse ourselves from asking why he used it and what he made of it. Or we see that he has done something that would please his audience; and we dismiss it as accounted for, forgetting that perhaps it also pleased *him*, and that we have to account for *that*. Or knowledge of his stage shows us the stage-convenience of a scene; and we say that the scene was due to stage-convenience, as if the cause of a thing must needs be single and simple. Such errors provoke the man who reads his Shakespeare poetically, and make him blaspheme our knowledge. But we ought not to fall into them; and we cannot reject any knowledge that may help us into Shakespeare's mind because of the danger it brings.

I cannot attempt to describe Shakespeare's theatre and audience, and much less to discuss the evidence on which a description must be based, or the difficult problems it raises. I must confine myself for the

most part to a few points which are not always fully realised, or on which there is a risk of misapprehension.

I.

Shakespeare, we know, was a popular playwright. I mean not only that many of his plays were favourites in his day, but that he wrote, mainly at least, for the more popular kind of audience, and that, within certain limits, he conformed to its tastes. He was not, to our knowledge, the author of masques composed for performance at Court or in a great mansion, or of dramas intended for a University or one of the Inns of Court; and though his company for some time played at the Blackfriars, we may safely assume that the great majority of his works were meant primarily for a common or 'public' theatre like the Globe. The broad distinction between a 'private' and a 'public' theatre is familiar, and I need only remind you that at the former, which was smaller, provided seats even in the area, and was nowhere open to the weather, the audience was more select. Accordingly, dramatists who express their contempt for the audience, and their disapproval of those who consult its tastes, often discriminate between the audiences at the private and public theatres, and reserve their unmeasured language for the latter. It was for the latter that Shakespeare mainly wrote; and it is pretty clear that Jonson, who greatly admired and loved him, was still of opinion that he condescended to his audience.¹

So far we seem to be on safe ground; and yet even here there is some risk of mistake. We are not to imagine that the audience at a private theatre (say the Blackfriars) accepted Jonson's dramatic

¹ This, one may suspect, was also the position of Webster, who praises Shakespeare, but groups him with Dekker and Heywood, and mentions him after Chapman, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher (Preface to the *White Devil*).

theories, while the audience at the Globe rejected them; or that the one was composed chiefly of cultured and 'judicious' gentlemen, and the other of riotous and malodorous plebeians; and still less that Shakespeare tried to please the latter section in preference to the former, and was beloved by the one more than by the other. The two audiences must have had the same general character, differing only in degree. Neither of them accepted Jonson's theories, nor were the 'judicious' of one mind on that subject. The same play was frequently offered to both. Both were very mixed. The tastes to which objection was taken cannot have been confined to the mob. From our knowledge of human nature generally, and of the Elizabethan nobility and gentry in particular, we may be sure of this; and Jonson himself implies it. Nor is it credible that an appreciation of the best things was denied to the mob, which doubtless loved what we should despise, but appears also to have admired what we admire, and to have tolerated more poetry than most of us can stomach. Neither can these groundlings have formed the majority of the 'public' audience or have been omnipotent in their theatre, when it was possible for dramatists (Shakespeare included) to say such rude things of them to their faces. We must not delude ourselves as to these matters; and in particular we must realise that the mass of the audience in both kinds of theatre must have been indifferent to the unities of time and place, and more or less so to improbabilities and to decorum (at least as we conceive it) both in manners and in speech; and that it must have liked excitement, the open exhibition of violent and bloody deeds, and the intermixture of seriousness and mirth. What distinguished the more popular audience, and the more popular section in it, was a higher degree of this indifference and this liking, and in addition a special fondness for certain sources of inartistic joy.

The most prominent of these, perhaps, were noise; rant; mere bawdry; 'shews'; irrelevant songs, ballads, jokes, dances, and clownage in general; and, lastly, target-fighting and battles.¹

We may describe Shakespeare's practice in broad and general terms by saying that he neither resisted the wishes of his audience nor gratified them without reserve. He accepted the type of drama that he found, and developed it without altering its fundamental character. And in the same way, in particular matters, he gave the audience what it wanted, but in doing so gave it what it never dreamed of. It liked tragedy to be relieved by rough mirth, and it got the Grave-diggers in *Hamlet* and the old countryman in *Antony and Cleopatra*. It liked a 'drum and trumpet' history, and it got *Henry V*. It liked clowns or fools, and it got Feste and the Fool in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's practice was by no means always on this level, but this was its tendency; and I imagine that (unless perhaps in early days) he knew clearly what he was doing, did it deliberately, and, when he gave the audience poor stuff, would not seriously have defended himself. Jonson, it would seem, did not understand this position. A fool was a fool to him; and if a play could be called a drum and trumpet history it was at once condemned in his eyes. One can hardly doubt that he was alluding to the *Tempest* and the *Winter's Tale* when, a few years after the probable date of their appearance, he spoke of writers who 'make nature afraid in their plays,' begetting 'tales, tempests, and such like drolleries,' and bringing in 'a servant-monster' or 'a nest of antiques.' Caliban was a 'monster,' and the London public loved to gape at monsters; and so, it appears, that wonderful creation was to Jonson something like the fat woman, or the calf with five legs, that we pay a

¹ I am obliged to speak summarily. Some of these things declined in popularity as time went on.

penny to see at a fair. In fact (how could he fail to take the warning?) he saw Caliban with the eyes of Trinculo and Stephano. 'A strange fish!' says Trinculo: 'were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver.' 'If I can recover him,' says Stephano, 'and keep him tame and get to Naples with him, he's a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat's-leather.' Shakespeare understood his monster otherwise; but, I fancy, when Jonson fulminated at the Mermaid against Caliban, he smiled and said nothing.

But my present subject is rather the tastes of the audience than Shakespeare's way of meeting them.¹

¹The examples just cited show his method at its best, and it would be easy to mention others far less satisfactory. Nor do I doubt that his plays would be much more free from blemishes of various kinds if his audience had added to their virtues greater cultivation. On the other hand the question whether, or how far, he knowingly 'wrote down to' his audience, in the sense of giving it what he despised, seems to me very difficult, if not impossible, to answer: and I may mention some causes of this difficulty.

(1) There is no general presumption against interpolations in an Elizabethan drama published piratically or after the author's death. We have, further, positive grounds of the strongest kind for believing that 'Shakespeare's plays' contain a good deal that Shakespeare never wrote. We cannot therefore simply take it for granted that he wrote every silly or offensive thing that we find in the volume; and least of all should we do this when the passage is more or less irrelevant and particularly easy to excise. I do not say that these considerations have great importance here, but they have some; and readers of Shakespeare, and even some scholars, constantly tend to forget them, and to regard the texts as if they had been published by himself, or by scrupulously careful men of letters immediately after his death.

(2) We must never take for granted that what seems to us feeble or bad seemed so to Shakespeare. Evidently he was amused by puns and quips and verbal ingenuities in which most of us find little entertainment. Gross jokes, scarcely redeemed in our eyes by their humour, may have diverted him. He sometimes writes, and clearly in good faith, what seems to us bombastic or 'conceited.' So far ■■■ this was the case he was not writing down to his audience. He shared its tastes, or the tastes of some section of it. So it may have been, again, with such a blot as the blinding of Gloucester on the open stage.

(3) Jonson defied his audience, yet he wrote a good deal that we think bad. In the same way certain of Shakespeare's faults *cannot* be due to condescension to his audience: e.g. the obscurities and distortions of language not infrequent in his later plays. And this may be

Let me give two illustrations of them which may have some novelty. His public, in the first place, dearly loved to see soldiers, combats, and battles on the stage. They swarm in some of the dramas a little earlier than Shakespeare's time, and the cultured dramatists speak very contemptuously of these productions, if not of Shakespeare's historical plays. We may take as an example the First Part of *Henry VI.*, a feeble piece, to which Shakespeare probably contributed touches throughout, and perhaps one or two complete scenes. It appears from the stage directions (which may be defective, but cannot well be redundant) that in this one play there were represented a pitched battle of two armies, an attack on a city wall with scaling-ladders, two street-scuffles, four single combats, four skirmishes, and seven excursions. No genuine play of Shakespeare's, I suppose, is so military from beginning to end; and we know how in *Henry V.* he laments that he must disgrace the name of Agincourt by showing four or five men with vile and ragged foils

Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous.

Still he does show them; and his serious dramas contain such a profusion of combats and battles as no playwright now would dream of exhibiting. We

so with some faults which have the appearance of arising from that condescension.

(4) Other defects again he might have deliberately defended; e.g. the highly improbable conclusions and the distressing mis-marriages of some of the comedies. 'It is of the essence of romantic comedy,' he might have said, 'to treat such things with indifference. There is a convention that you should take the characters with some degree of seriousness while they are in difficulties, and should cease to do so when they are to be delivered from them.' Do not we ourselves adopt this point of view to some extent when we go to the theatre now?

I added this note after reading Mr. Bridges's very interesting and original contribution to the Stratford Town edition of Shakespeare (vol. x.). I disagree with some of Mr. Bridges's remarks, and am not always repelled by things that he dislikes. But this brief note is not, of course, meant for an answer to his paper; it merely suggests reasons for at least diminishing the proportion of defect attributable to a conscious sacrifice of art to the tastes of the audience.

expect these things perhaps in the English history-plays, and we find them in abundance there : but not there alone. The last Act in *Julius Cæsar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline* ; the fourth Act of *Antony and Cleopatra* ; the opening Acts of *Coriolanus*,—these are all full of battle-scenes. If battle cannot be shown, it can be described. If it cannot be described, still soldiers can be shown, and twice in *Hamlet* Fortinbras and his army march upon the stage.¹ At worst there can be street-brawls and single fights, as in *Romeo and Juliet*. In reading Shakespeare we scarcely realise how much of this kind is exhibited. In seeing him acted we do not fully realise it, for much of it is omitted. But beyond doubt it helped to make him the most popular dramatist of his time.

If we examine Shakespeare's battles we shall observe a certain peculiarity, which is connected with the nature of his theatre and also explains the treatment of them in ours. In most cases he does not give a picture of two whole armies engaged, but makes a pair of combatants rush upon the stage, fight, and rush off again ; and this pair is succeeded by a second, and perhaps by a third. This hurried series of single combats admitted of speech-making ; perhaps it also gave some impression of the changes and confusion of a battle. Our tendency, on the other hand, is to contrive one spectacle with scenic effects, or even to exhibit one magnificent tableau in which nobody says a word. And this plan, though it has the advantage of getting rid of Shakespeare's poetry, is not exactly dramatic. It is adopted chiefly because the taste of our public is, or is supposed to be, less dramatic than spectacular, and because, unlike the Elizabethans, we are able to gratify such a taste. But there is another fact to be remembered

¹ To us their first appearance is of interest chiefly because it introduces the soliloquy 'How all occasions.' But, it is amusing to notice, the Folio, which probably represents the acting version in 1623, omits the soliloquy but retains the marching soldiers.

here. Few playgoers now can appreciate a fencing-match, and much fewer a broad-sword and target fight. But the Elizabethan public went to see performances of this kind as we go to see cricket or football matches. They might watch them in the very building which at other times was used as a playhouse.¹ They could judge of the merit of the exhibition when Hotspur and Prince Henry fought, when Macduff 'laid on,' or when Tybalt and Mercutio used their rapiers. And this was probably another reason why Shakespeare's battles so often consist of single combats, and why these scenes were beloved by the simpler folk among his audience.

Our second illustration concerns the popular appetite for musical and other sounds. The introduction of songs and dances² was censured as a corrupt gratification of this appetite. And so it was when the songs and dances were excessive in number, irrelevant, or out of keeping with the scene. I do not remember that in Shakespeare's plays this is ever the case; but, in respect of songs, we may perhaps take Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* as an instance of abuse. For in each of the two Parts of that play there are directions for five songs; and, since not even the first lines of these songs are printed, we must suppose that the leader of the band, or the singing actor in the company, introduced whatever he chose. In addition to songs and dances, the musicians, at least in some plays, performed between the Acts; and the practice of accompanying certain speeches by low music—a practice which in some performances of Shakespeare now has become a pest—has the sanction of several Elizabethan playwrights, and (to a slight extent) of Shakespeare. It seems

¹ I do not refer to the Globe.

² The latter, no doubt, accompanied by the band, except when the clown played the tabor while he danced alone.

clear, for example, that in *Twelfth Night* low music was played while the lovely opening lines ('That strain again') were being spoken, and also during a part of the dialogue preceding the song 'Come away, come away, death.' Some lines, too, of Lorenzo's famous speech about music in the *Merchant of Venice* were probably accompanied; and there is a still more conspicuous instance in the scene where Lear wakes from his long sleep and sees Cordelia standing by his side.

But, beyond all this, if we attend to the stage-directions we shall realise that in the serious plays of Shakespeare other musical sounds were of frequent occurrence. Almost always the ceremonial entrance of a royal person is marked by a 'flourish' or a 'sennet' on trumpets, cornets, or hautboys; and wherever we have armies and battles we find directions for drums, or for particular series of notes of trumpets or cornets appropriate to particular military movements. In the First Part of *Henry VI.*, to take that early play again, we must imagine a dead march, two other marches, three retreats, three sennets, seven flourishes, eighteen alarums; and there are besides five directions for drums, one for a horn, and five for soundings, of a kind not specified, by trumpets. In the last three scenes of the first Act in *Coriolanus*—scenes containing less than three hundred and fifty lines—there are directions for a parley, a retreat, five flourishes, and eight alarums, with three, less specific, for trumpets, and four for drums. We find about twenty such directions in *King Lear*, and about twenty-five in *Macbeth*, a short play in which hautboys seem to have been unusually favoured.¹ It is evident that the audience loved these sounds, which, from their prevalence in passages of special kinds, seem to have been intended chiefly to stimulate excitement,

¹ This may possibly be one of the signs that *Macbeth* was altered after Shakespeare's retirement or death.

and sometimes to heighten impressions of grandeur or of awe.

But this is not all. Such purposes were also served by noises not musical. Four times in *Macbeth*, when the Witches appear, thunder is heard. It thunders and lightens at intervals through the storm-scenes in *King Lear*. Casca and Cassius, dark thoughts within them, walk the streets of Rome in a terrific thunderstorm. That loud insistent knocking which appalled Macbeth is repeated thrice at intervals while Lady Macbeth in vain endeavours to calm him, and five times while the Porter fumbles with his keys. The gate has hardly been opened and the murder discovered when the castle-bell begins its hideous alarm. The alarm-bell is used for the same purpose of intensifying excitement in the brawl that ruins Cassio, and its effect is manifest in Othello's immediate order, 'Silence that dreadful bell.' I will add but one instance more. In the days of my youth, before the melodrama audience dreamed of seeing chariot-races, railway accidents, or the infernal regions, on the stage, it loved few things better than the explosion of fire-arms; and its favourite weapon was the pistol. The Elizabethans had the same fancy for fire-arms, only they preferred cannon. Shakespeare's theatre was burnt down in 1613 at a performance of *Henry VIII.*, not, I suppose, as Prynne imagined, by a Providence which shared his opinion of the drama, but because the wadding of a cannon fired during the play flew to the thatch of the roof and set it ablaze. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare gave the public plenty that they could not understand, but he made it up to them in explosions. While Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are waiting for the Ghost, a flourish is heard, and then the roar of cannon. It is the custom to fire them when the King drinks a pledge; and this King drinks many. In the fencing-scene at the end he proposes to drink one for every

hit scored by his beloved nephew; and the first hit is duly honoured by the cannon. Unexpected events prevented the celebration of the second, but the audience lost nothing by that. While Hamlet lies dying, a sudden explosion is heard. Fortinbras is coming with his army. And, as if that were not enough, the very last words of the play are, 'Go, bid the soldiers shoot,' and the very last sound of the performance is a peal of ordnance. Into this most mysterious and inward of his works, it would seem, the poet flung, as if in derision of his cultured critics, well-nigh every stimulant of popular excitement he could collect: 'carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts'; five deaths on the open stage, three appearances of a ghost, two of a mad woman, a dumb-show, two men raving and fighting in a grave at a funeral, the skulls and bones of the dead, a clown bandying jests with a prince, songs at once indecent and pathetic, marching soldiers, a fencing-match, then a litter of corpses, and explosions in the first Act and explosions in the last. And yet out of this sensational material—not in spite of it, but out of it—he made the most mysterious and inward of his dramas, which leaves us haunted by thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls; and he knew that the very audience that rejoiced in ghosts and explosions would listen, even while it was waiting for the ghost, to that which the explosion had suggested,—a general disquisition, twenty-five lines long, on the manner in which one defect may spoil a noble reputation. In this strange harmony of discords, surely unexampled before or since, we may see at a glance the essence of Elizabethan drama, of its poet, and of its audience.

2.

We have been occupied so far with characteristics of the drama which reflect the more distinctively popular tastes objected to by critics like Jonson.

We may now pass on to arrangements common to all public theatres, whether the play performed were Jonson's or Shakespeare's; and in the first instance to a characteristic common to the public and private theatres alike.

As everyone knows, the female parts in stage-plays were taken by boys, youths, or men (a mask being sometimes worn in the last case). The indecorous Elizabethans regarded this custom almost entirely from the point of view of decorum and morality. And as to morality, no one, I believe, who examines the evidence, especially as it concerns the state of things that followed the introduction of actresses at the Restoration, will be very ready to dissent from their opinion. But it is often assumed as a matter beyond dispute that, on the side of dramatic effect, the Elizabethan practice was extremely unfortunate, if not downright absurd. This idea appears to me, to say the least, exaggerated. Our practice may be the better; for a few Shakespearean parts it *ought* to be much better; but that, on the whole, it is decidedly so, or that the old custom had anything absurd about it, there seems no reason to believe. In the first place, experience in private and semi-private performances shows that female parts may be excellently acted by youths or men, and that the most obvious drawback, that of the adult male voice, is not felt to be nearly so serious as we might anticipate. For a minute or two it may call for a slight exertion of imagination in the audience; but there is no more radical error than to suppose that an audience finds this irksome, or to forget that the use of imagination at one point quickens it at other points, and so is a positive gain. And we have further to remember that the Elizabethan actor of female parts was no amateur, but a professional as carefully trained as an actress now; while dramatically he had this advantage over the actress, that he was regarded simply as a player,

and not also as a woman with an attractive or unattractive person.¹

In the second place, if the current ideas on this subject were true, there would be, it seems to me, more evidence of their truth. We should find, for example, that when first the new fashion came in, it was hailed by good judges as a very great improvement on the old. But the traces of such an opinion appear very scanty and doubtful, while it is certain that one of the few actors who after the Restoration still played female parts maintained a high reputation and won great applause. Again, if these parts in Shakespeare's day were very inadequately performed, would not the effect of that fact be distinctly visible in the plays themselves? The rôles in question would be less important in Shakespeare's dramas, for example, than in dramas of later times: but I do not see that they are. Besides, in the Shakespearean play itself the female parts would be much less important than the male: but on the whole they are not. In the tragedies and histories, it is true, the impelling forces of the action usually belong in larger measure to men than to women. But that is because the action in such plays is laid in the sphere of public life; and in cases where, in spite of this, the heroine is as prominent as the hero, her part—the part of Juliet, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth—certainly requires as good acting as his. As to the comedies, if we ask ourselves who are the central or the most interesting figures in them, we shall find that we pronounce a woman's name at least as often as a man's. I understate the case. Of Shakespeare's mature comedies the *Merchant of Venice*, I believe, is the only one where this name would unquestionably be a man's, and in three of the last five it would almost certainly be a woman's—

¹ Surely every company that plays Shakespeare should include a boy. There would then be no excuse for giving to a woman such parts as Ariel and Brutus's boy Lucius.

Isabella's, Imogen's, Hermione's. How shall we reconcile with these facts the idea that in his day the female parts were, on the whole, much less adequately played than the male? And finally, if the dramatists themselves believed this, why do we not find frequent indications of the belief in their prologues, epilogues, prefaces, and plays?¹

We must conclude, it would seem, that the absence of actresses from the Elizabethan theatre, though at first it may appear to us highly important, made no great difference to the dramas themselves.

3.

That certainly cannot be said of the construction and arrangements of the stage. On this subject a great deal has been written of late years, and as regards many details there is still much difference of opinion.² But fortunately all that is of great moment for our present purpose is tolerably certain. In trying to bring it out, I will begin by reminding you of our present stage. For it is the stage, and not the rest of the theatre, that is of special interest here; and no serious harm will be done if, for the rest, we imagine Shakespeare's theatre with boxes, circles, and galleries like our own, though in the shape of a more elongated horse-shoe than ours. We must imagine, of course, an area too; but there, as we shall see, an important difference comes in.

¹This question will not be answered by the citation of one famous speech of Cleopatra's—a speech, too, which is strictly in character. But, as to this matter and the other considerations put forward above, I must add that, while my impression is that what has been said of Shakespeare holds of most of the contemporary dramatists, I have not verified it by a research. A student looking for a subject for his thesis might well undertake such a research.

²When the lecture was given (in 1902) I went more fully into details, having arrived at certain conclusions mainly by an examination of Elizabethan dramas. I suppress them here because I have been unable to study all that has since been written on the Elizabethan stage. The reader who is interested in the subject should refer in the first instance to an excellent article by Mr. Archer in the *Quarterly Review* for April, 1908.

Our present stage may be called a box with one of its sides knocked out. Through this opening, which has an ornamental frame, we look into the box. Its three upright sides (for we may ignore the bottom and the top) are composed of movable painted scenes, which are changed from time to time during the course of the play. Before the play and after it the opening is blocked by a curtain, dropped from the top of the frame; and this is also dropped at intervals during the performance, that the scenes may be changed.

In all these respects the Elizabethan arrangement was quite different. The stage came forward to about the middle of the area; so that a line bisecting the house would have coincided with the line of footlights, if there had been such things. The stage was therefore a platform viewed from both sides and not only from the front; and along its sides, as well as in front of it, stood the people who paid least, the groundlings, sometimes punningly derided by dramatists as 'the men of understanding.' Obviously, the sides of this platform were open; nor were there movable scenes even at the back of it; nor was there any front curtain. It was overshadowed by a projecting roof; but the area, or 'yard,' where the groundlings stood, was open to the weather, and accordingly the theatre could not be darkened. It will be seen that, when the actors were on the forward part of the stage, they were (to exaggerate a little) in the middle of the audience, like the performers in a circus now. And on this forward naked part of the stage most of a Shakespearean drama was played. We may call it the main or front stage.¹

If now we look towards the rear of this stage, what do we find? In the first place, while the back

¹ This is a description of a public theatre. A private one, it will be remembered, had seats in the area (there called the pit), was completely roofed, and could be darkened.

of our present-day box consists of a movable scene, that of the Elizabethan stage was formed by the 'tiring-house,' or dressing-room, of the actors. In its wall were two doors, by which entrances and exits were made. But it was not merely a tiring-house. In the play it might represent a room, a house, a castle, the wall of a town; and the doors played their parts accordingly. Again, when a person speaks 'from within,' that doubtless means that he is in the tiring-house, opens one of the doors a little, and speaks through the chink. So apparently did the prompter.

Secondly, on the top of the tiring-house was the 'upper stage' or 'balcony,' which looked down on the platform stage. It is hardly possible to make brief statements about it that would be secure. For our purposes it may be imagined as a balcony jutting forward a little from the line of the tiring-house; and it will suffice to add that, though the whole or part of it was on some occasions, or in some theatres, occupied by spectators, the whole or part of it was sometimes used by the actors and was indispensably requisite to the performance of the play. 'Enter above' or 'enter aloft' means that the actor was to appear on this upper stage or balcony. Usually, no doubt, he reached it by a ladder or stair inside the tiring-house; but on occasions there were ascents or descents directly from, or to, the main stage, as we see from 'climbs the tree and is received above' or 'the citizens leap from the walls.' The reader of Shakespeare will at once remember many scenes where the balcony was used. On it, as the city wall, appeared the Governor and citizens of Harfleur, while King Henry and his train stood before the gates below. From it Arthur made his fatal leap. It was Cleopatra's monument, into which she and her women drew up the dying Antony. Juliet talked to Romeo from it; and from it Romeo ('one kiss and I'll descend') 'goeth down'

to the main stage. Richard appeared there between the two bishops; and there the spectators imagined Duncan murdered in his sleep.¹ But they could not look into his chamber. The balcony could be concealed by curtains, running, like all Elizabethan stage curtains, on a rod.

In the third place, there was, towards the back of the main stage, a part that could be curtained off, and so separated from the front part of that stage. Let us call it the back stage. It is the matter about which there is most difficulty and controversy; but the general description just given would be accepted by almost all scholars and will suffice for us. Here was the curtain (more strictly, the curtains) through which the actors peeped at the audience before the play began, and at which the groundlings hurled apples and other missiles to hasten their coming or signify disapproval of them. And this 'back stage' was essential to many performances, and was used in a variety of ways. It was the room where Henry IV. lay dying; the cave of Timon or of Belarius; probably the tent in which Richmond slept before the battle of Bosworth; the cell of Prospero, who draws the curtains apart and shows Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess within; and here, I imagine, and not on the balcony, Juliet, after drinking the potion, 'falls upon her bed within the curtains.'² Finally, the back stage accounts for those passages where, at the close of a death-scene, there is no indication that the corpse was carried off the stage. If the death took place on the open stage, as it usually did, this of course was necessary, since there was no front curtain to drop; and so we usually find in the

¹ 'The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms Do mock their charge with snores,' says Lady Macbeth on the stage below; and no doubt the tiring-house doors *were* open.

² This view, into the grounds of which I cannot go, implies that Juliet's bedroom was, in one scene, the upper stage, and, in another, the back stage; but the Elizabethans, I believe, would make ■■ difficulty about that.

dialogue words like 'Take up the bodies' (*Hamlet*), or 'Bear them from hence' (*King Lear*). But Desdemona was murdered in her bed on the back stage; and there died also Othello and Emilia; so that Lodovico orders the bodies to be 'hid,' not carried off. The curtains were drawn together, and the dead actors withdrew into the tiring-house unseen,¹ while the living went off openly.

This triple stage is the primary thing to remember about Shakespeare's theatre: a platform coming well forward into the yard, completely open in the larger front part, but having further back a part that could be curtained off, and overlooked by an upper stage or balcony above the tiring-house. Only a few further details need be mentioned. Though scenery was unknown, there were plenty of properties, as may be gathered from the dramas and, more quickly, from the accounts of Henslowe, the manager of the Rose. Chairs, benches, and tables are a matter of course. Kent sat in the stocks. The witches had a caldron. Imogen slept in a bed, and Iachimo crept out of his trunk in her room. Falstaff was carried off the stage in a clothes-basket. I have quoted the direction 'climb the tree.' A 'banquet' figures in Henslowe's list, and in the *Tempest* 'several strange shapes' bring one in. He mentions a 'tomb,' and it is possible, though not likely, that the tomb of the Capulets was a property; and he mentions a 'moss-bank,' doubtless such as that where the wild thyme was blowing for Titania. Her lover, you remember, wore an ass's head, and the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives* a buck's. There were whole animals, too. 'A great horse with his legs'

¹ Perhaps. It seems necessary to suppose that the sides of the back-stage, as well as its front, could be open; otherwise many of the spectators could not have seen what took place there. But it is not *necessary*, so far as I remember, to suppose that the sides could be closed by curtains. The Elizabethans probably would not have been troubled by seeing dead bodies get up and go into the tiring-house when a play or even a scene was over.

is in Henslowe's list; and in a play not by Shakespeare Jonah is cast out of the whale's belly on to the stage. Besides these properties there was a contrivance with ropes and pulleys, by which a heavenly being could descend from the stage-roof (the 'heaven'), as in *Cymbeline* Jupiter descends upon his eagle. When his speech is over we find the direction 'ascends.' Soon after comes another direction: 'vanish.' This is addressed not to Jupiter but to various ghosts who are present. For there was a hollow space under the stage, and a trap-door into it. Through this ghosts usually made their entrances and exits; and 'vanish' seems commonly to mean an exit that way. Through it, too, arose and sank the witches' caldron and the apparitions shown to Macbeth. A person could speak from under the stage, as the Ghost does when Hamlet calls him 'old mole'; and the musicians could go and play there, as they do in the scene where Antony's soldiers hear strange music on the night before the battle; 'Musicke of the Hoboyes is under the Stage' the direction runs ('Hoboyes' were used also in the witch-scene just mentioned).

4.

We have now to observe certain ways in which this stage with its arrangements influenced the dramas themselves; and we shall find that the majority of these influences are connected with the absence of scenery. In this, to begin with, lies the main, though not the whole, explanation of the shortness of the performance. In our Shakespeare revivals the drama is always considerably cut down; and yet, even where no excessive prominence is given to scenic display, the time occupied is seldom less than three hours, and often a good deal more. In Shakespeare's day, as we gather from various sources (*e.g.* from the Prologues to *Romeo and Juliet*

and *Henry VIII.*), the customary time taken by the un-shortened play was about two hours. And the chief reason of this great difference obviously is that the time which we spend in setting and changing scenes his company spent in acting the piece. At a given signal certain characters appeared. Unless a placard announced the place where they were supposed to be,¹ the audience gathered this from their conversation, or in the absence of such indications asked no questions on the subject. They talked for a time and went away; and at once another set appeared. The intervals between the acts (if intervals there were, and however they were occupied) had no purpose connected with scene-changing, and must have been short; and the introduction and removal of a few properties would take next to no time from the performance.² We may safely assume that not less than a hundred of the hundred and twenty minutes were given to the play itself.

The absence of scenery, however, will not wholly account for the difference in question. If you take a Shakespearean play of average length and read it at about the pace usual in our revivals, you will find, I think, that you have occupied considerably more than a hundred or a hundred and twenty minutes.³ The Elizabethan actor can hardly have spoken so slowly. Probably the position of the stage, and especially of the front part of it where most of the action took place, was of advantage to him in this respect. Standing almost in the middle of his audience, and at no great distance from any section

¹ Where this contrivance was used at all it probably only announced the general place of the action throughout the play: e.g. *Denmark*, or, a little more fully, *Verona*, *Mantua*.

² It is possibly significant that *Macbeth* and the *Tempest*, plays containing more 'shews' than most, are exceptionally short.

³ It suffices for this rough experiment to read a column in an edition like the Globe, and then to multiply the time taken by the number of columns in the play.

of it, he could with safety deliver his lines much taster than an actor can now. He could speak even a 'passionate' speech 'trippingly on the tongue.' Hamlet bids him do so, warns him not to mouth, and, when the time for his speech comes, calls impatiently to him to leave his damnable faces and begin; and this is not the only passage in Elizabethan literature which suggests that good judges objected to a slow and over-emphatic delivery. We have some actors not inferior in elocution, we must presume, to Burbage or Taylor, but even Mr. Vezin or Mr. Forbes Robertson may find it difficult to deliver blank verse intelligibly, musically, and rapidly out of our stage-box.¹

I return to the absence of scenery, which even in this matter must be more important than the position of the stage or the preference for rapid speech. It explains, secondly, the great difference between Elizabethan and more modern plays in the number of the scenes.² This number, with Shakespeare, averages somewhere about twenty: it reaches forty-two in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and sinks to nine in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and the *Tempest*. In the fourth act of the first of these plays there are thirteen scenes, no one of them in the same place as the next. The average number in Schiller's plays seems to be about eight. In plays written now it corresponds not unfrequently with the number of acts.³ The primary cause of this difference, though not the only one, is, I presume, that we expect to see appropriate surroundings,

¹ I do not know whether the average size of our theatres differs much from that of the Elizabethan. The diameter of the area at the *Fortune* and the *Globe* seems to have been fifty feet.

² I mean by a scene a section of a play before and after which the stage is unoccupied. Most editions of Shakespeare are faulty in the division of scenes (see *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 451).

³ So it very nearly does in some Restoration comedies. In the *Way of the World* the scenery is changed only twice in the five acts, though there are more than five scenes.

at the least, for every part of the story. Such surroundings mean more or less elaborate scenery, which, besides being expensive, takes a long time to set and change. For a dramatist accordingly who *is* a dramatist and wishes to hold his audience by the play itself, it is an advantage to have as few scenes as may be. And so the absence of scenery in Shakespeare's day, and its presence in ours, result in two totally different systems, not merely of theatrical effect, but of dramatic construction.

In certain ways it was clearly an advantage to a playwright to be able to produce a large number of scenes, varying in length according to his pleasure, and separated by almost inappreciable intervals. Nor could there be any disadvantage in this freedom, if he had a strong feeling for dramatic construction, and a gift for it, and a determination to construct as well as he could. But, as a matter of fact, many, perhaps the majority, of the pre-Shakespearean dramas are put together very loosely; scene follows scene in the manner of a casual narrative rather than a play; and a good deal is admitted for the sake of its immediate attraction and not because it is essential to the plot. The freedom which we are considering, though it could not necessitate these defects, gave the widest scope for them; the majority of the audience probably was, and continued to be, well-nigh indifferent to them; and a large proportion of the plays of Shakespeare's time exhibits them in some degree. The average drama of that day has great merits of a strictly dramatic kind, but it is not well-built, it is not what we mean by 'a good play'; and if we look at it from the restricted point of view implied by that phrase we shall be inclined, I think, to believe that it would have been a better play if its author had been compelled by the stage-arrangements to halve the number of the scenes. These remarks will hold of Shakespeare himself. Some of his most delightful

dramas, indeed,—for instance, the two Parts of *Henry IV.*—make little or no pretence to be well-constructed wholes; and even in those which fully deserve that title a certain amount of matter not indispensable to the plot is usually to be found. In point of construction *Othello* is the best of his tragedies, *Julius Cæsar* better than *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* perhaps the faultiest. To say that this depends solely on the number of scenes would be ridiculous, but still it is probably significant that the numbers are, respectively, fifteen, eighteen, twenty-one, and forty-two.

The average Elizabethan play could not, of course, have been converted into a well-built fabric by a mere reduction of the number of its scenes; and in some cases no amount of rearrangement of the whole material employed could have produced this result. This means, however, on the other hand, that the Elizabethans, partly from the very simplicity of their theatrical conditions, were able to handle with decided, though usually imperfect, dramatic effect subjects which would present difficulties still greater, if not insuperable, to a playwright now. And in Shakespeare we can trace, in this respect and in others, the advantages connected with the absence of scenery. He could carry his audience freely from one country, town, house or room, to another, or from this part of a battle-field to that, because the audience imagined each place and saw none. I take an extreme example. The Third Act of *Antony and Cleopatra*, according to modern editions, contains thirteen scenes, and these are the localities assigned to them: (1) a plain in Syria, (2) Rome, an ante-chamber in Cæsar's house, (3) Alexandria, Cleopatra's palace, (4) Athens, a room in Antony's house, (5) the same, another room, (6) Rome, Cæsar's house, (7) near Actium, Antony's camp, (8) a plain near Actium, (9) another part of the plain, (10) another part of the plain, (11)

Alexandria, Cleopatra's palace, (12) Egypt, Cæsar's camp, (13) Alexandria, Cleopatra's palace. I wonder how long this Act would take on our stage, where each locality must be represented. Three hours perhaps, of which the performance might occupy one-eighth. But in Shakespeare's day there was no occasion for any stage-direction as to locality throughout the Act.

Again, Shakespeare's method of working a double plot depends largely on his ability to bring the persons belonging to the two plots on to the stage in alternate scenes of no great length until the threads are combined. This is easily seen in *King Lear*; and there we can observe, further, how he varies the pitch of feeling and provides relief by interposing short quiet scenes between longer exciting ones. By this means, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the Storm-scene on the heath, which if undivided would be intolerable, is broken into three, separated by very short duologues spoken within the Castle and in prose. Again, since scene follows scene without a pause, he could make one tell on another in the way either of intensification or of contrast. We catch the effect in reading, but in our theatres it is usually destroyed by the interval. Finally, however many scenes an Act may contain, Shakespeare can keep attention glued to the play throughout the Act, because there are no intervals. So can our playwrights, because they have but one or two scenes in the Act. But in our reproductions of Shakespeare, though the number of scenes is reduced, it can scarcely ever be reduced to that extent; so that several times during an Act, and many times during the play, we are withdrawn perforce from the dramatic atmosphere into that of everyday life, solitary impatience or ennui, distracting conversation, third-rate music, or, occasionally, good music half-drowned in a babble of voices.

If we consider the characteristics on which I have been dwelling, and bear in mind also the rapidity of speech which we have found to be probable, we shall realise that a performance in Shakespeare's day, though more of the play was performed, must have been something much more variegated and changeful, and much lighter in movement, than a revival now. And this difference will have been observed by those who have seen Shakespeare acted by the Elizabethan Stage Society, under the direction of Mr. Poel, who not only played scene after scene without intervals, but secured in a considerable degree that rapidity of speech.

A minor point remains. The Elizabethan stage, we have seen, had no front curtain. The front curtain and the use of scenery naturally came in together, for the second, so far as the front stage was concerned, was dependent on the first; and as we have already glanced at some effects of the absence of the second, that of the first will require but a few additional words. It was clearly in some ways a great disadvantage; for every situation at the front of the stage had to be begun and ended before the eyes of the audience. In our dramas the curtain may rise on a position which the actors then had to produce by movements not really belonging to the play; and, what is more important, the scene may advance to a striking climax, the effect of which would be greatly diminished and sometimes destroyed if the actors had to leave the stage instead of being suddenly hidden. In Elizabethan plays, accordingly, we seldom meet with this kind of effect, though it is not difficult to discover places where it would have been appropriate. But we shall not find them, I venture to think, in tragedies. This effect, in other words, appears properly to belong to comedy and to melodrama (if that species of play is to be considered here at all); and the Elizabethans lost nothing by their inability to misuse it in tragedy, and especially

at the close of a tragedy. Whether it can be artistic to end any serious scene whatever at the point of greatest tension seems doubtful, but surely it is little short of barbarous to drop the curtain on the last dying words, or, it may be, the last convulsion, of a tragic hero. In tragedy the Elizabethan practice, like the Greek, was to lower the pitch of emotion from this point by a few quiet words, followed perhaps by sounds which, in intention at least, were majestic or solemn, and so to restore the audience to common life 'in calm of mind, all passion spent.' Thus Shakespeare's tragedies always close; and the end of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is not *Exeunt Devils with Faustus*, but the speech beginning

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.

In this particular case Marlowe, if he had not been ■ poet, might have dispensed with the final descent. or ascent, from the violent emotions attending the catastrophe; but in the immense majority of their tragedies the Elizabethans, even if they had wished to do as we too often do, were saved from the temptation by the absence of a front curtain.¹

¹ The 'back' stage, which had curtains, must, I suppose, have been too small to accommodate the number of persons commonly present, alive or dead, at the close of a tragedy. I do not know if any recent writer has raised and discussed the questions how often the back stage is used in the last scene of an Elizabethan play, and, again, whether it is often employed at all in order to produce, by the closing of the curtains, the kind of effect referred to in the paragraph above. Perhaps the fact that the curtains had to be closed by an actor, within them or without, made this effect impossible. Or perhaps it was not desired. In Shakespeare's tragedies, if my memory serves me, the only sudden or startling appeals of an outward kind (apart, of course, from actions) are those produced by supernatural appearances and disappearances, as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. These, we have seen, were usually managed by means of the trap-door, which, it would seem from some passages, must have been rather large. These matters deserve investigation if they have not already received it.

5.

Hitherto we have not considered a Shakespearean performance on the side, I will not say of its spectacular, but of its pictorial effect. This must be our last subject. We have to bear in mind here three things: the fact that the stage was viewed from three sides, its illumination by daylight throughout the play, and the absence of scenery. It is obvious that the last two deprived the audience of many attractive or impressive pictures; while, as to the first, it seems unlikely that actors who were watched from the sides as well as the front would study to group themselves as parts of a composition addressed to the eye. Indeed one may doubt whether, except in regard to costume, they seriously attended to the pictorial effect of a drama at all; their tiny crowds and armies, for example, cannot have provided much of a show. And in any case it is clear that the audience had to dispense with many more or less beautiful sights that we may now enjoy. But the question whether their loss was, on the whole, a disadvantage is not so easy to answer; for here again it freed them from a temptation—that of sacrificing dramatic to pictorial effect; and we cannot tell whether, or how far, they would have been proof against its influence. Let us try, however, to see the position clearly.

The essence of drama—and certainly of Shakespearean drama—lies in actions and words expressive of inward movements of human nature. Pictorial effects (if for convenience' sake the various matters under consideration may be signified by that phrase) are in themselves no more dramatic than songs, dances, military music, or the jests of a 'fool.' Like these other things, they may be made dramatic. They may be used and apprehended, that is to say, as elements fused with the essential elements of dramatic effect. And, so far as this is the case and

they thus contribute to that effect, they are, it seems clear, an unmixed advantage. But a distinct and separate attention to them is another matter; for, the moment it sets in, attention begins to be withdrawn from the actions and words, and therefore from the inward movements that these express. And experience shows that, as soon as pictorial attractions exceed a certain limit, impossible to specify in general terms, they at once influence the average play-goer in this mischievous way. It is, further, well-nigh inevitable that this should happen. However interesting the actions, words, and inward movements may be, they call for some effort of imagination and of other mental activities,¹ while stage-pictures demand very little; and accordingly, at the present time at any rate, the bulk of an audience to which the latter are abundantly presented will begin to enjoy them for their own sakes, or as parts of a panorama and not of a drama. No one, I think, can honestly doubt this who watches and listens to the people sitting near him at what the newspapers too truly call 'an amazing Shakespearean spectacle.' If we are offered a pretty picture of the changing colours of the sky at dawn, or of a forest glade with deer miraculously moving across its sunny grass, most of us cease for the time to be an audience and become mere spectators; and let Romeo and Juliet, or Rosalind and Orlando, talk as like angels as they will, they will talk but half-heeded. Our dramatists know this well enough. Mr. Barrie and Mr. Pinero and Mr. Shaw, who

¹ I do not refer to such deliberate and sustained effort as a reader may sometimes make. It is not commonly realised that continuous attention to any imaginative or intellectual matter, however enjoyable, involves considerable strain. If at a lecture or sermon a careless person makes himself observable in arriving late or leaving early, the eyes of half the audience will turn to him and follow him. And the reason is not always that the speaker bores them; it is that involuntarily they seek relief from this strain. The same thing may be seen in the concert-room or theatre, but very much less at a panorama, because the mere use of the eyes, even when continuous, is comparatively easy.

want the audience to listen and understand, take good care not to divert its attention and deaden its imagination by scenic displays. And yet, with the heartiest admiration for their best work, one may say that Shakespeare's requires more attention and imagination than theirs.

Whether the Elizabethan companies, if they had had the power to use the attractions of scenery, would have abused it, and whether in that case the audience would have been as readily debauched as ours, it is useless to dispute. The audience was not composed mainly of groundlings; and even the groundlings in that age had drama in their blood. But I venture to disbelieve that the main fault in these matters lies, in any age, with the audience. It is like the populace in Shakespeare's plays, easy to lead wrong but just as easy to lead right. If you give people in the East End, or even in the Albert Hall, nothing but third-rate music, most of them will be content with it, and possibly may come to disrelish what is better. But if you have a little faith in great art and in human nature, and offer them, I do not say the Diabelli variations, but such music as the symphonies of Beethoven or even of Brahms, they will justify your faith. This is not theory, but fact; and I cannot think that it is otherwise with drama, or at least with the dramas of Shakespeare. Did they ever 'spell ruin to managers' if they were, through the whole cast, satisfactorily acted? What spells real ruin to managers and actors alike is what spells degradation to audiences.¹

¹ I am not referring here, or elsewhere, to such a moderate use of scenery in Shakespearean performances as most of our actor-managers (e.g. Mr. Benson) now adopt. I regret it in so far as it involves a curtailing of the play; but I do not think it withdraws from the play any attention that is of value, and for some of the audience it probably heightens the dramatic effect. Still, in my belief, it would be desirable to decrease it, because the less there is of it, the more is good acting necessary, and the more of the play itself can be acted. Some use of scenery, with its consequences to the play, must unquestionably be accepted as the rule, but I would add that it ought always to be

But whether or no Shakespeare's audience could have been easily degraded by scenic pleasure, it had not the chance; and I will not raise the further question how far its disabilities were the cause of its virtues, but will end with a few words on two of the virtues themselves. It possessed, first, a vivid imagination. Shakespeare could address to it not in vain the injunction, 'Work, work your thoughts!' Probably in three scenes out of five the place and surroundings of the action were absolutely invisible to its eyes. In a fourth it took the barest symbol for reality. A couple of wretched trees made the Forest of Arden for it, five men with ragged foils the army that conquered at Agincourt: are we stronger than it, or weaker? It heard Romeo say

Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;

and to its mind's eye they were there. It looked at a shabby old balcony, but as it listened it saw the swallows flitting round the sun-lit battlements of Macbeth's castle, and our pitiful sense of grotesque incongruity never troubled it.¹ The simplest convention sufficed to set its imagination at work. If Prospero entered wearing a particular robe, it knew that no one on the stage could see his solid shape;² and if Banquo, rising through the trap-door, had his bloody face dusted over with meal, it recognised him for a ghost and thrilled with horror; and we, Heaven help us, should laugh. Though the stage stood in broad daylight, again, Banquo, for it, was being murdered on a dark wet night, for he carried

possible for us to see performances, such as we owed to Mr. Poel, nearer to those of Shakespeare's time.

¹ When, in the time of Malone and Steevens, the question was debated whether Shakespeare's stage had scenery, it was argued that it must have had it, because otherwise the contrast between the words and the visible stage in the passage referred to would have been hopelessly ludicrous.

² 'Enter invisible' (a common stage-direction) means 'Enter in the dress which means to the audience that you are invisible.'

a torch and spoke of rain ; and the chaste stars were shining for it outside Desdemona's chamber as the awful figure entered and extinguished the lamp. Consider how extraordinary is the fact I am about to mention, and what a testimony it bears to the imagination of the audience. In *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, not one scene here and there but actually the majority of the most impressive scenes take place at night, and, to a reader, depend not a little on the darkness for their effect. Yet the Ghost-scenes, the play-scene, the sparing of the king at prayer, that conversation of Hamlet with his mother which is opened by the killing of Polonius and interrupted by the appearance of the Ghost ; the murder of Duncan, the murder of Banquo, the Banquet-scene, the Sleep-walking scene ; the whole of the first Act of *Othello*, the scene of Cassio's drunken revel and fight, and the whole of the terrible last Act,—all of this was played in a theatre open to the afternoon sun, and was written by a man who knew that it was so to be played. But he knew his audience too.¹

That audience had not only imagination, and the power to sink its soul in the essence of drama. It had something else of scarcely less import for Shakespeare, the love of poetry. Ignorant, noisy, malodorous, too fond of dances and songs and dirty jokes, of soldiers and trumpets and cannon, the groundling might be : but he liked poetry. If he had not liked it, he, with his brutal manners, would have silenced it, and the Elizabethan drama could never have been the thing it was. The plays of Shakespeare swarm with long speeches, almost all of which are cut down or cut clean away for our theatres. They are never, of course, irrelevant ; sometimes they are indispensable to the full appre-

¹ Probably he never needed to think of the audience, but wrote what pleased his own imagination, which, like theirs, was not only dramatic but, in the best sense, theatrical

ciation of a character; but it is manifest that they were not written solely for a dramatic purpose, but also because the author and his audience loved poetry. A sign of this is the fact that they especially abound where, from the nature of the story, the dramatic structure is imperfect.¹ They abound in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Henry V.* more than in *Othello* or *Much Ado*. Remember, for a standard of size, that 'To be or not to be' is thirty-three lines in length, and then consider the following fact. *Henry V.* contains seventeen speeches longer than that soliloquy. Five of them are between forty and fifty lines long, two between fifty and sixty, and two exceed sixty. Yet if any play entirely by Shakespeare were open to the charge of being a 'drum and trumpet history' written to please the populace, it would be *Henry V.* Not only then the cultured section of the audience loved poetry; the whole audience loved it. How long would they have continued to relish this 'perpetual feast of nectared sweets' if their eyes had been feasted too? Or is it likely that, once habituated to spectacular stimulants, they would have welcomed 'the crystal clearness of the Muses' spring'?

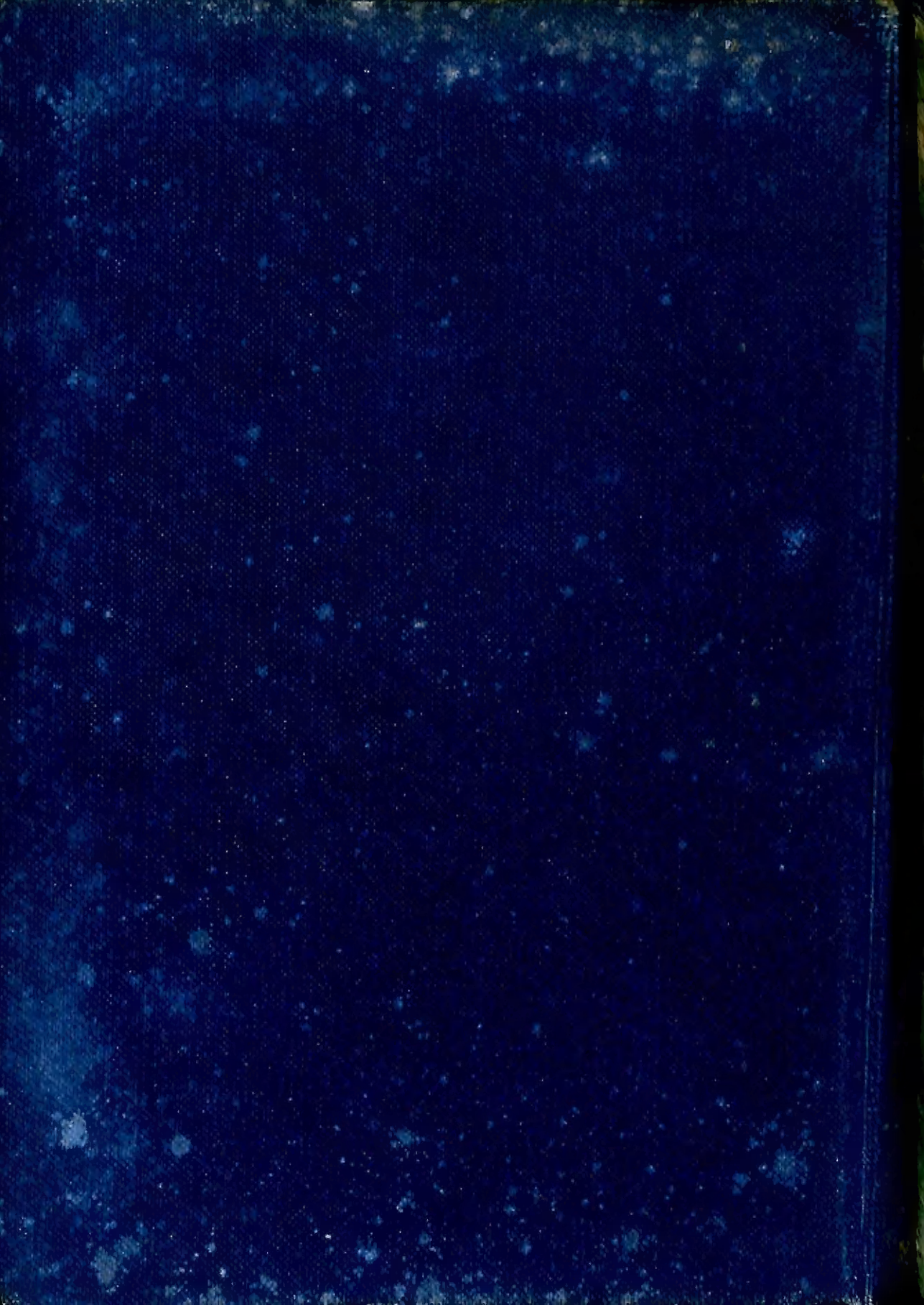
1902.

¹ Their abundance in *Hamlet* results partly from the character of the hero. They helped, however, to make that play too long; and the omission of 'How all occasions' from the Folio doubtless means that the company cut this soliloquy (whether they did so in the author's life-time we cannot tell). It may be noticed that, where a play shows clear signs of revision by Shakespeare himself, we rarely find a disposition to shorten long poetical speeches.

In some of these lectures¹—for the duties and pleasures that have fallen to me as Professor of Poetry are now to end—I may have betrayed a certain propensity to philosophise. But I should ask pardon for this only if I believed it to intrude where it has no place, in the imaginative perception of poetry. Philosophy has long been at home in this University; in the remarkable development of English philosophical thought during the last five-and-thirty years Oxford has played a leading part; and I hope the time will never come when a son of hers will need to apologise to his brethren for talking philosophy. Besides, though I owe her gratitude for many gifts, and most for the friendships she gave me, her best intellectual gift was the conviction that what imagination loved as poetry reason might love as philosophy, and that in the end these are two ways of saying the same thing. And, finally, I hoped, by dwelling in these lectures (for instance, with reference to the poets of Wordsworth's time) on the connection of poetry with the wider life around it, to correct an impression which my opening lecture seems here and there to have left. Not that I can withdraw or even modify the view put forward then. So far as any single function of spiritual life can be said to have an intrinsic value, poetry, it seems to me, possesses it just as other functions do, and it is in each case irreplaceable. And further, it seems to me, poetry attains its own aim, and in doing so makes its contribution to the whole, most surely and fully when it seeks its own end without attempting

¹ As the order of the lectures has been changed for the purposes of publication, I have been obliged to move these concluding sentences from their original place at the end of the lecture on *The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth*.

to reach those of co-ordinate functions, such as the attainment of philosophic truth or the furtherance of moral progress. But then I believe this because I also believe that the unity of human nature in its diverse activities is so intimate and pervasive that no influence can affect any one of them alone, and that no one of them can operate or change without transmitting its influence to the rest. If I may use the language of paradox I would say that the pursuit of poetry for its own sake is the pursuit both of truth and of goodness. Devotion to it is devotion to 'the good cause of the world'; and wherever the imagination is satisfied, there, if we had a knowledge we have not, we should discover no idle fancy but the image of a truth.



By A. C. Bradley, LL.D., Litt.D.

SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello,
King Lear, and Macbeth: 8vo. 15s. net

By George Saintsbury

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.
Crown 8vo. 18s. net

By John Buxton

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY AND THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE. 8vo: 18s. net

By Sir Charles Tennyson

ALFRED TENNYSON. Ex.Cr. 8vo. 30s. net

By Sir Maurice Bowra

FROM VIRGIL TO MILTON. 8vo. 15s. net

THE HERITAGE OF SYMBOLISM. 8vo. 15s. net

HEROIC POETRY. 8vo: 40s. net

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO LTD